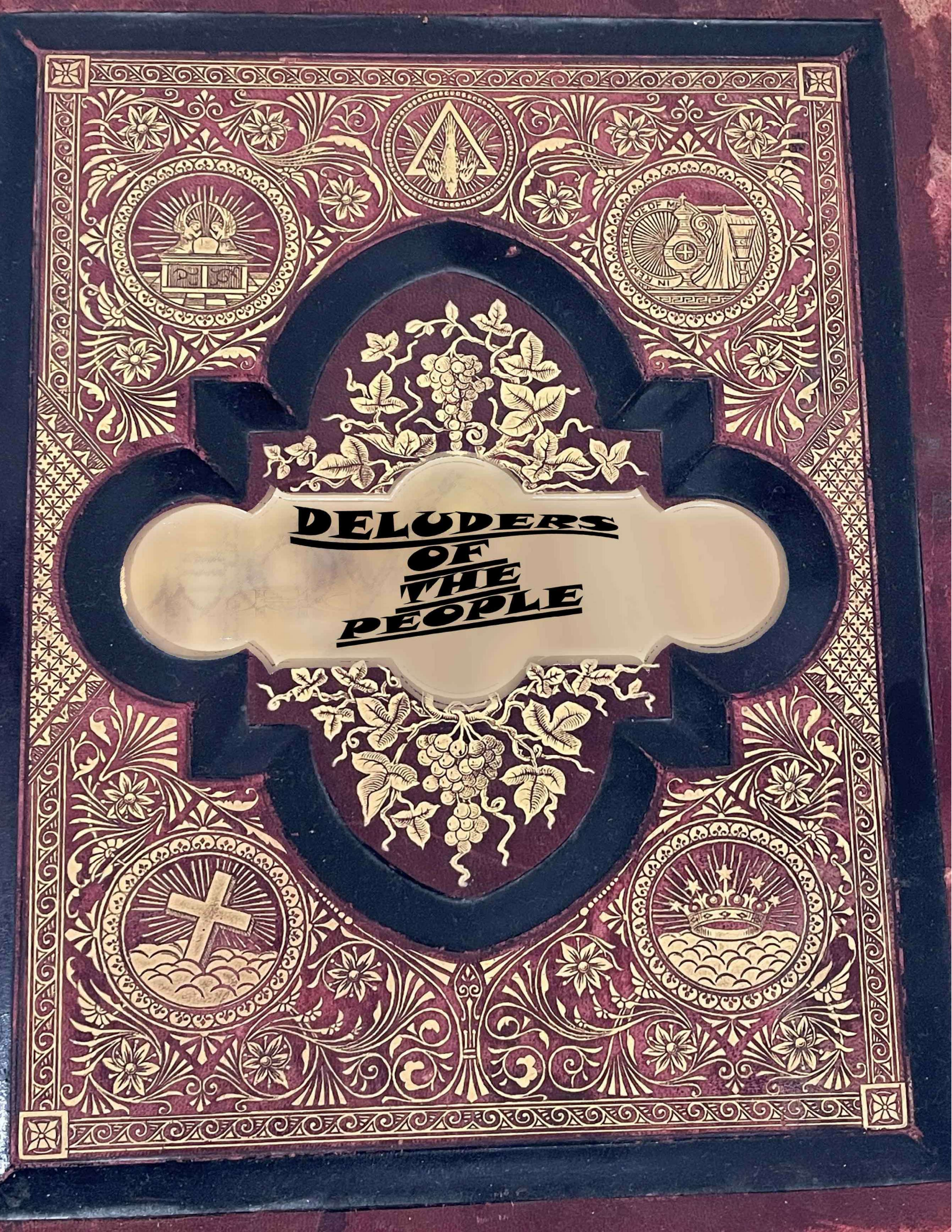
DELUDERS
OF
THE
PEOPLE

Deluders of the People

By

Martin Marprelate*

*An author reserving no rights that have not already been usurped.

For public domain. 2025.

Foreword

The law does not forget your choices.

What you decide in moments of pressure
becomes the record of your life.

The past is not buried --
it stands in judgment.

Every path you take forecloses another.

And when the reckoning comes,
you will be measured by the choices you
made.*

— Robert H. Jackson, Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States and Chief Prosecutor, Nuremberg Trials

* *the Headless Horseman is pardoned in advance.*

Day 1 Agenda

Welcome to the Inaugural First Annual Reunion of the Sons of Liberty of New York
Theme: *Who in the Herd is Heard?*
Please check your Burfies regularly for changes in the agenda.
Registration (Casino) -- *Johnny Carson & Washington Irving*
Opening (Auditorium) -- *William Duer & Johnny Carson*
Break *(Don't miss the 1-Way Pavilion & singing Darth Vaders)*
Key Note Speech (Cathedral)
Introduction -- Johnny Carson
Keynote speaker -- John Knox
Humblest award -- John Rodgers & Charles Inglis
Break *(Restrooms crowded – run! At least 1 on every floor)*
America the Beautiful (John Street Theatre)
Break *(Interview Johnny Carson)*
Sleepy Hollow -- *Rip Van Wrinkle and the Apple*
Break (Concord K) (*Thru Concords A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I)*
Wall Street Parade -- *Johnny Carson, John Rodgers, Washington Irving, Andy Griffith, William Shakespeare, Albert Einstein, Alfred Hitchock, Pablo Picasso and Darth Vader.*
No Break
Interview (O'Liargram) -- *Johnny Carson, Charles Ishley, John Rodgers.*
America's Dilemma! (Studio) -- *Dick Cavett*
Break *(serenade by the Young Republicans)*
Reckoning (Federal Building) -- *America the Lost*
Aftermath (Supreme Court) -- *the Lawsuit*

Registration

At the registration table, Johnny Carson and Washington Irving sit side by side. Washington Irving is gyrating like Pinocchio learning to walk, clapping his hands, and saying, "Perfect! Perfect!"

Perfect? What could possibly be perfect?

Nothing is perfect.

That can't be a real person.

Maybe he's not here at all.

Wherever "here" is.

Carson knows he's at the Casino. He knows that he has been other places and other times, but he can remember none of them. He only knows what he knows. He knows this is the Casino, but is not the only box of its kind.

A cloud of smoky red, green and gold swirls at the end of the corridor. Men like mice pull one-- armed bandits. Wheels spin to reveal a man's fortune. Girls dressed like grown-ups offer drinks for free and other services at a substantial cost.

Bells ring

coins clink

and the floor sings of money changing hands.

And so it goes -- day and night.

All life long.

Carson cannot look around.

He is a Registrar for the First Annual Reunion of the Sons of Liberty of New York.

SOL of New York. Or, as the Headless Horseman says: Sons of Liberty are "Sorry Out of Luck…"

As a Registrar, Carson can neither turn his head nor move the knee being jabbed by the table strut. He must sit looking straight ahead with his forehead slightly wrinkled and his chin raised as if in welcome.

He cannot see his companion beside him.

But he knows it is Washington Irving.

It is the nature of the Casino that he cannot know even what he knows.

It is not a belief. It is not subject to proof. It is as it is. Known.

But not understood.

Knowledge with no source. Not associated with the eyes, ears, word of mouth, or books. Knowledge -- as if coming from the cells themselves.

This he knows. He is at the Casino. Washington Irving is next to him. He is a registrar at the First Annual Reunion of the Sons of Liberty of New York.

He doesn't know how he got here.

Time and space change. But he doesn't know what happens in between. Like a cruise ship. Fall asleep in Rome and wake in Florence. A river is crossed without crossing it. A journey ending before it begins.

He has become concerned with senility. He does not forget what he remembers, but he doesn't know what he forgets. So how can he know if he forgets when he only knows what he remembers?

He knows that it is Washington Irving beside him – though he has never met the man and has only a vague shadow of memory connected to the name. Sleepy Hollow, Headless Horseman, and Rip Van Winkle.

He also knows that George Washington must be the first signature on the Registration Book.

They have been waiting for George Washington for hours.

Maybe this is another of Stanley Milgram's experiments. Rather than shock people who give the wrong answers, they see how long it takes to break a professional.

Johnny Carson doesn't break. He certainly isn't going to pull out the rubber chicken now.

Although -- were he subject to breakage --that in front of him would challenge his resolve.

Registrants are everywhere. On chairs with legs draped over briefcases, at bars eating tacos, staring at phones and computers, sleeping… Children are staring at screens.

Some mill around the gate watching the screen intently to see if their number will be called.

More attention than I ever get, thinks Carson.

He should try that someday. Pass numbers to the studio audience.

Then spend the whole show randomly calling numbers.

They would hear nothing that he said, but they would be appear to be listening…

Among the waiting registrants, little whack-a-moles pop up intermittently.

"Hey, pretty lady… Look here! Look here! New… I give it to you cheap!" *Whack!*

"Hey, Mistah, special price – just for you!" *Whack!*

"You drop your smile back there —come pick it up here!" *Whack!*

"Any help for this poor man?" *Whack!*

"Hey, mister, can you spare a dime?

I've worked my fingers to the bone
and all I've got to show for it are
bony fingers."

Whack! Whack! Whack!

They don't really bother anyone.

If they're noticed, they're deported or thrown in prison.

Carson is uncomfortable.

This late start offends every cell in his body. It announces incompetence. Compounded every moment the audience is not compensated by entertainment or food.

Who is managing this studio?

It is the audience that matters – not the performer. There's no show without an audience.

Is a star a star if no one sees him?

Inside he's twisting. But he knows his face has remained unchanged and he has not betrayed his impatience. He knows every muscle in his face and how to ensure that it does not betray his feelings.

The people waiting to register disappear at the horizon and the task of distributing registration packets appears nearly impossible.

Does an infinite need ever end?

Insatiable is insatiable, after all.

But Carson is a professional. Hasn't squeezed the rubber chicken yet.

A professional knows how to hold his urine.

No matter how uncomfortable it might be.

He's a pro. Comforting pained body parts with promises, while smiling at guests. "Just ten minutes," he says to the headache that is squeezing him.

But you can't fool your own bladder.

And there is no clock in this place.

No clock!

It is, perhaps, the most unfathomable of the unfathomable Casino. How can anything be organized without a clock?

When and where are the pivots of existence!

If you add "with whom" you have nearly every story that has ever been written.

Yet, here -- there is no clock.

Nor can one get from here to there.

One is where one is when one is and with whomever one is with.

Which makes it nearly impossible to act.

A professional must have a clock.

What is a professional but a time--spending man?

Time is a pearl to be gathered and mined. Never to be wasted.

Every second has a cost.

Consumed at great care.

Counted and measured for dollars.

But a clock is necessary because

… inside …

nothing is counted…

Time has no meaning.

When Carson is performing his internal clock disappears. Along with the rest of himself.

He is melded with his guest -- like dancers. He listens to the audience the way a sailor listens to the wind. Absorbed in the movement, consumed as a whole, the watcher gone, he hardly exists at all. He has no sense of time or space, but, like a lover, feels the current and sways with it.

As though one part of his brain is sleeping while the other is awake.

He has to study the tapes to discover what he said.

As a performer, he is always split in two. The one who is performing and the one who is feeling the performance.

Which means the cues have to be very simple.

Red light on: performance.

Red light off: John Carson returns.

Countdown clock: how much longer the performance. The countdown to freedom for John Carson.

No clock.

No freedom anticipated.

No rules apply in the Casino.

Except those set by the Casino.

Which, in this case means: they can't go forward without George Washington.

An announcer states that George Washington is delayed again. It looked like he was on his way but he encountered a bit of a glitch at Valley Forge.

They're working on it and hope to get the problem resolved by September 3, 1783.

Washington Irving, the Uncle Sam clown beside him, says: "So perfect! So perfect!"

Then he says: "All men must wait for Caesar!"

The script!

With an invisible startle, Johnny Carson remembers there is a script.

He straightens his back and looks sincerely at the camera – a little too sincerely, perhaps. He softens his brow. Then he tilts his head, as if

pretending not to be serious-- which is how he tells people he really is serious, and he says:

All men should wait for His Royal Eminence, His Excellency George Washington. What man is more worthy of our time than he? He is the most virtuous man in America.

He hopes he emphasized "should" properly.

Who writes these scripts?

It must be a comedy show.

Washington Irving unfolds himself into a gangly scarecrow and says, with rising oratory:

He was no king, no Caesar, but a citizen. A man who saw the nation as a trust, not a throne. In his modesty lay his majesty…Virtuous….

Irving's voice wavers. The last word — "virtuous" — thins to a thread, muffled, as if carried off by a faulty microphone.

A cane strikes the floor behind Carson and he almost startles but squelches the impulse immediately.

With a sniff and a sour mouth, Justice Thomas Jones, says: "Virtuous? George Washington, virtuous? Maybe so…"

But then he sucks in a deep breath and he says in flames: "Damn the man's virtues! He stole my country!"

Justice Thomas Jones slams his cane on the floor with every word:

The rebellion was hatched in hypocrisy, nurtured in sedition, and brought forth in treason. The Presbyterians, with their canting sermons and seditious prayers, were the midwives of

this monstrous birth. They called themselves patriots, yet robbed their neighbors with impunity. They preached liberty, yet silenced dissent with tar and feathers. Their justice was the gallows, their mercy the pillory.

Beside him, Washington Irving, squirming like a balloon man in the wind, says:

Those sturdy rebels, with their fiery speeches and impudent remonstrances, strutted about like bantam cocks in a barnyard, each crowing louder than the last, and mistaking noise for valor. They brandished their grievances like weapons, and though they had never smelt powder nor seen a battlefield, they fancied themselves the saviors of the province, destined to rescue it from the tyranny of windmills and wooden shoes.

Was that good or bad? Carson wonders. That's the problem satire: The good looks bad and the bad looks good. At least, in the first glance.

He had presumed that this interchange was scripted to be point/counterpoint but Washington Irving wasn't really either point or counterpoint.

He was something else instead.

Behind Carson, the cane strikes again. Louder. "I was born in this country! My father was born in this country! This is my country!"

A trumpet.

Darth Vader drags off Justice Jones, still crying: "I speak truth! I speak truth!"

Carson keeps his eyes fixed on the audience, his smile pinned. The crowd is already cheering the music.

The parade has begun.

The red light is on.

The whole Casino vibrates and rumbles.

Carson concentrates on looking pleased while his teeth clatter against each other and his skin crawls in protest.

From the horizon, the parade becomes visible.

Darth Vaders on tanks, on horses, on the shoulders of the people… On every street in America.

Preceded by the Headless Horseman Band.

They are playing "The 12 Perks of Power."

On the first day of Power, my country
gave to me -- a room in Florida for free…

On the second day of Power, my country
gave to me: two dodged fines and a room
in Florida, for free!

On the third day of Power, my country
gave to me: three hushed funds. Two
dodged fines, and a room in Florida for
free.

On the fourth day of Power, my country
gave to me: Four corporate perks. Three
hushed funds. Two dodged fines, and a
room in Florida for free!

On the fifth day of Power, my country
gave to me: Five golden wings… Four
corporate perks, three hushed funds, two
dodged fines, and a room in Florida for
free.

On the sixth day of Power, my country
gave to me: Six bribes a'laying. Five

golden wings. Four corporate perks, three hushed funds, two dodged fines, and a room in Florida for free.

On the seventh day of Power, my country gave to me: Seven yachts a'floating, six bribes a'laying. Five golden wings. Four corporate perks, three hushed funds, two dodged fines, and a room in Florida for free.

On the eighth day of Power, my country gave to me: Eight donors dining. seven yachts a'floating, six bribes a'laying. Five golden wings. Four corporate perks, three hushed funds, two dodged fines, and a room in Florida for free.

On the ninth day of Power, my country gave to me: Nine clucks complying, eight donors dining, seven yachts a'floating, six bribes a'laying. Five golden wings. Four corporate perks, three hushed funds, two dodged fines, and a room in Florida for free!

On the tenth day of Power, my country gave to me: Ten lords a'leaping, nine clucks complying, eight donors dining, seven yachts a'floating, six bribes a'laying. Five golden wings. Four corporate perks, three hushed funds, two dodged fines, and a room in Florida for free.

On the eleventh day of Power, my country gave to me: Eleven aides arranging, ten lords a'leaping, nine clucks complying, eight donors dining, seven yachts a'floating, six bribes a'laying.

Five golden wings. Four corporate perks,
three hushed funds, two dodged fines, and
a room in Florida for free.

On the twelfth day of Power, my country
gave to me: Twelve titles pending.
Eleven aides arranging, ten lords
a'leaping, nine clucks complying, eight
donors dining, seven yachts a'floating, six
bribes a'laying. Five golden wings. Four
corporate perks, three hushed funds, two
dodged fines, and a room in Florida for
free!

With the cries of immigrants beneath their feet, and merchants with no customers, and children terrified at doughnut shops,

the Darth Vader Band were whistled back to their barracks.

Next comes William Duer.

A woman in a man's body or a man in a woman's body or just the undivided Adam and Eve. Their right side a round--cheeked chocolate African and their left side something else. Wearing a ruffled skirt in green red and white – emblazoned with stickers of Christmas or Mexico or Italy or red roses and white whiskers. Hopping forward on one cowboy boot and a running shoe, with money dangling from one ear and promises from the other.

Riding a rifle with a stick horse head and saddlebags of Bibles and reusable water bottles with a gym towel.

William Duer blocks Carson's view.

Carson frowns. Not a professional.

William Duer says:

Burfie! Hello!

And… Here he comes! Here he comes!
Oh, my god! Oh, my god!
Isn't this exciting? Isn't this exciting?

Did you ever think we'd get to share such a moment?

And look what he is wearing!!
The Washington Ascendancy Wool Command Cloak™—and you all know that is the outerwear equivalent of divine providence wrapped in excellency.
Isn't it?
I just love mine!
You'll love yours too.
Tailored to perfection. Available in Celestial Blue: kissed by liberty herself.
And those buttons… Solid brass! Forged in the fires of moral clarity.
Each one whispers, "I crossed the Delaware and I looked good while doing it!"
Of course, we use only 100% Revolutionary Wool—a true replica of the sheep raised at George Washington's mansion in Valley Forge.

But the *pièce de resistance*, the *coup d'etat*, are the epaulettes…
Each fringe has been individually blessed for success by the General himself or his designee.
Around the stiff red, white, and blue base is the The Sovereign Spiral™: A gold cord so tightly wound it chokes dissent.
Available in styles befitting a General or a President.
Manifest your destiny! Dress for success!

Use code HEADLESSHORSEMAN for 2024% more gravitas in your life.

Then, you, too, can become like George Washington…

In a flourish of fog, William Duer disappears with a final: "Don't forget! Say *Burfie* before you say hello!"

The red light is on.

Carson's body is prodding him. Urine waits for no one… But his bladder has never failed him before…

A sole bugle announces the arrival of George Washington.

From the thick fog of Jockey Hollow in Morristown New Jersey, a horse and rider emerge together, stark against the dimming lights.

At first Johnny Carson thinks it is the Headless Horseman. But this one definitely has a head. Apparently, one can have a head and still be President.

While proud and graceful and elegant, the white horse is limping, splashed with mud, and slashed with cuts. It's tail low and drooping.

While tall and straight, and resolute, the rider's fine uniform is torn and muddy and bloody. His shoulders are bent. His face is twisted in pain.

General George Washington!

(Hint for home-schoolers: He was the First President of the United States.)

Sound is sucked from the Casino like water in a drain.

General Washington dismounts slowly, steadies himself with a hand on the horse's neck, then turns to face the hall.

Without reading the disclosure, he strides to the Registration Book and signs with a decisive flourish.

He then remounts his horse and turns to the people. His back to Johnny Carson, he looks down that long concourse disappearing in the horizon – beyond the line of Darth Vaders holding them back.

His voice is measured, grave, and weary, George Washington says:

Burfie.
Hello.

I come before you today,
not in triumph, but in despair;
not by choice, but by duty.
I came to say: Enough.
Dayenu.
Enough.

My dead boys -- those brave soldiers -- did not suffer and die so their nation could be sold to O'Liargram for a room and bar tab.

We were a diverse and motley coalition -- from the north and the south, the wealthy and the poor, the educated and the mob, the aristocracy and the servants, the Dutch and the English, the Irish and the Scots, the slave-holders and the abolitionists…

We could not unite except on one issue.

Our people deserved better. Our children deserved better. We expected to die.

None of us expected to win.
And, rarely during the pendency of the war, did it appear that we would.

Our differences astronomical, yet, still we united for the people.

We shared one thing: We chose the people over ourselves.

A life of usefulness -- rather than a life of greed.

To build -- rather than plunder.
To create -- rather than destroy.
To offer freedom and liberty -- rather than demand obedience and loyalty.

We expected to die.
Each one of us expected to die.
We were traitors to the king.

But we believed the cause for others
was more valuable than our own lives.

How many Darth Vaders can say that today?

What are you dying for? What are killing for? Darth Vader in our own streets?

I shudder with fury at your abuse and mindless obedience and wanton murder of civilians. A disgrace to the real men of virtue who bore arms for their country.

Do not believe that we did not face temptations.

We, too, could have taken care of ourselves.

Like Benedict Arnold. Or, once won, we could have turned against the Bill of Rights and plundered and stolen like the king's nobles. Like the Headless Horseman.

We too, could have made deals behind closed doors.
We, too, could have taken filled our own coffers.

We, too, could have bought pardons and positions of power.

(Though, perhaps, not quite as easily as a bar tab and a room… Now there is a ledger of corruption. Proudly kept in the bathrooms of O'Liargram itself.)

When last I stood among you, I spoke of Providence:

of the sacred fire of liberty, and
of the trust that a people place
in the virtue of their leaders.

I warned against faction,
against foreign influence,
against the intoxication of power.

I prayed that my refusal of a crown would be proof that a man can let go of dominion. That a country might remain free from the temptations of greed and power.

Sadly now a Headless Horseman is driving the steed with fear, hatred and greed.

Perhaps it is not too late yet to save our dreams, our integrity, our honor --
to make our struggle, once again, worthwhile…

Many a battle can be lost without the war being over.

And we have, many times in this union, faced dark days that defied light.
We have seen our country sold many times by every arm of government and commerce.
This is not new.

But corruption in all the departments…

This is unprecedented.

A Headless Horseman in charge of all three pillars of government. No checks or balance for the people -- many

checks and a very high balance for the Headless Horseman
and his cronies.

And the states have fallen as well.
The benefits an idol reaps with icons and ideology.

Now the very grain is rotten.
Each seat in government is
filled and purchased
by cash or oaths of loyalty and
obedience.
Virtue has been trumped by greed.
When the grain is rotten, it is hard to conceive of good bread.

Yet
We are one.
We rise together.
Or we fall together…

By the way, congrats on ending slavery.

With that, George Washington bows his head once, and mounts his weary steed again, and turns into the fog, his shoulders slumped, his horse limping.

The red light goes off.

Break

Johnny Carson sprints to the bathroom, his *Burfie* blinking yellow.

But then there is the bugle call for the opening assembly and he is swept into the Auditorium.

Opening and Introduction

In the Auditorium, Doc Severinsen and his band are playing "Yankee Doodle." William Duer is standing at the lectern. On the screen behind him, fireworks are silently bursting in air. The Headless Horseman leading a parade of marching Darth Vaders in front of Congress while men and women stand on scaffolding to repair the damage to the Capital.

"January Sixth was a great day for the nation," says the banner.

The Auditorium is filled with indistinct faces.

William Duer says:

Welcome! Welcome!

My bad.
That's on me -- I said welcome before I said *Burfie*.
But I did say *Burfie* before I said *hello*! So, technically, I am not in breach of contract! Though irritating sponsors is not wise…

Anyway, welcome to the First Annual Reunion of the Sons of Liberty. Sponsored by *Burfie*.

> (Don't forget: Say *Burfie* before you say hello!
> And tell them that William Duer sent you!)

I am William Duer and I just need to share some basic housekeeping details for our reunion.
I am required to remind you:

Check your *Burfie*s to determine your individual rights and responsibilities.
Know your place. Unless your *Burfie* is designated private by the Headless Horseman, you must follow laws.

All laws are for your safety and security.

Federal law requires your compliance with all information signs, posted placards, and verbal instructions from Darth Vader in all of his positions -- entrances, exits, and roving.

Failure to immediately respond to any instruction -- reasonable or not -- will result in removal, fines, transportation to a foreign country where our laws don't apply, or such further measures as are judged necessary to preserve order in the Big Beautiful Government as perceived by the Headless Horseman.

Federal law also requires that you display your *Burfie* at all times.

You will need to wear a *Burfie* to enter presentations, shows, exhibit halls, and the tar-and-feathering demonstrations..

Remember; Without a *Burfie* you aren't here at all. It is your passport and your key. It protects you wherever you go.

> Green: Proceed.
> Yellow: Wait your turn. Be patient. Call back.
> Red: Don't move. Darth Vader is already on the way.

Exits are in every room you enter. Be sure you find them. Otherwise, you can't get out.

If you do get lost, just follow the floorplan for the Dallas Airport as interpreted by IKEA.

Or ask any Darth Vader conveniently placed every 14 feet throughout the Convention for your safety and protection.

Every convention comes with certain guarantees:

Restrooms will be infinitely far away and very crowded -- everyone having left the same assembly at the same time. Be sure to make multiple reservations.

Fresh water is available from Flint Michigan.

The reading room and computer laboratory is next to the Zumba lessons and beneath the gym.

Smoking is restricted to the gym.

Children's Hour begins at ten past midnight.

And every room is guaranteed to be across from the ice machine…

Which you might need if you go to see our tar-and-feather experts!
They have set up station by the pool.
Get a sizzle today!

Free speech is allowed for 144 characters per room. With permits approved at least 365 days in advance by 7 separate agencies who each require 9 months to review the application.

(Additional characters available for purchase at the front desk. Certain limitations may apply. Money trumps all. Citizens, unite!)

Complaints are welcomed in the round bucket on the floor of every room. By the desk.

We're very glad all of you are here and we look forward to hearing from you!

And we will!

(Because your *Burfie* will contact us if you don't…)

And now, to truly open this first annual reunion…

The King of Late Night Television:

The man voted most often watched from under the sheets and between the toes --
the first laugh heard by zygotes everywhere…

Mr. Johnny Carson!

(And don't forget: Say *Burfie* before you say hello! Walter Duer sent you…)

With a final wave, William Duer disappears.

The Darth Vader Band is playing "Yankee Doodle." Bombs are bursting in air. The Headless Horseman leading a parade of marching Darth Vaders in front of the Supreme Court.

Johnny Carson comes through rainbow curtains, waves, grins, pretends a golf swing, then says:

We have a great program scheduled for you today.

But, before we proceed: Remember -- say *Burfie* before you say hello.

That goal accomplished, let me welcome you sincerely to the First Annual Reunion of the Sons of Liberty of New York--known affectionately as Sol. The sun, the wise man, and the king. Or: Solly, in Brooklyn.

Or: Sorry Out of Luck, D.C.!

The First Annual Reunion…
Did you hear that? Does that bother anyone else?

Five minutes into a political rally and I'm already promising the impossible. It can't be annual if a year has not passed from the first; it can't be a reunion unless there was a union; and there can't be first without a second.

And, yet: it sounds good, doesn't it? First Annual Reunion.

No, seriously. This should be a great convention this week.

In this, our inaugural year, we will be addressing the central question: "*Who in the Herd is Heard*?"
At least, that's what I heard…

Our keynote speaker, John Knox, is the founder of Presbyterianism -- a few hundred years ahead of the times in

his attitudes. He was known as Scotland's Headless Horseman.
Aren't we lucky to have him?

During the break, I highly recommend that you visit the One Way Pavilion.

And don't miss Rip Van Wrinkle's re-awakening in Sleepy Hollow. There's a parade.

Of course, as always, in this inaugural convention, we will have plenty of time to hear the children's views. They will be singing their own rendition of "America the Beautiful," giving us adults some good advice, and, finally, asking for our help.

The theme of our gathering -- *Who in the Herd is Heard?* -- I heard was suggested by Reverend Doctor John Rodgers. It arose from the concern that procedural barriers prevent the dissidents of today from being heard in the herd.

We had thousands of suggestions.
So, sorry out of luck. S.O.L.
We could only choose one.

The thousands of losers, of course, will never be heard.
Except by their *Burfies*.

*Burfie*s… Aren't they amazing?

I just received mine. It's looks like a little button – like the battery in a keychain. But when you put it in the *Burfie* slot, you get a *Burfie* like no one else's. A *Burfie* that knows you better than your mother.

And a lot better than your wife!

That's a blessing and a curse, fellas…

My receptacle is the American flag. Do you see? The stripes light up when it's receiving information. Or transmitting.

A popular style is dog tags. Like we wore in the military… Dog tags so they could identify our bodies.

Now, with *Burfie*, they identify us while we're still alive.

And no longer limit the disclosure to name, rank, and serial number.

What you forget, your *Burfie* remembers. They even know what you confessed to AI last night…

I must admit, I see many advantages.

Burfie identifies threats before your eyes see them or your brain recognizes the danger.

It tells you instantly whether you will like someone or not. So, you avoid unpleasant exchanges with people who disagree with you.

And no one is in control but you. You set your preferences. Colors, eye shapes… Liberal, atheist. Age. Sex or lack thereof. Favorite activities…. Even whether you like to sleep with a fan or not.

I slept with a few fans… Never turned out well.

With *Burfie*, every stranger becomes a potential friend.

Before you say hello, you have updated contact lists, pictures, occupations, restaurant preferences, leisure activities … It just pulls the information you ask for from every *Burfie* you pass.

That's why you say *Burfie* before you say hello.

By the time you say hello: the conversation is already going great!

So now, let's get on with the show!

But, before you go, you must listen to this important announcement.

From the sky and the walls all around, the announcer booms:

Welcome to the Auditorium.

For your safety, please remain seated until the aisles are clear and the red light is no longer illuminated. The Auditorium will empty from the front to the back as directed by your *Burfie*.

Federal Law requires that I remind you: Know your place. Check your *Burfie*s for your individual rights and responsibilities.

Most people are required to follow the laws. The decision to prosecute is subject to purchase. Money trumps all.

You are required to display your *Burfie* at all times.

During the break, we encourage you to go to the Exhibit Hall. It is in Concourse D. The quickest way to get there is to walk from A to B to C to D.

The government is always here to help you.
When you need us: Tell your *Burfie* to call Darth Vader.

We're already watching you.

The seatbelt sign goes off, everyone stands, then row-by-row, the Auditorium empties.

And Johnny Carson sprints off to the restroom.

Break

Finally! A break!

Carson rushes to relieve himself, loosening the top button of his pants as he hurries.

And there it is -- right around the corner. That welcome sign. Upcoming: a porcelain audience for that splash of relief!

But it is already too late.

He is blocked by a crowd of people with *Burfie*s waving above them like reeds in a field, all squealing: "Here's Johnny!"

Carson ducks his head, shields his eyes and tries to push through.

Then he stops. He is a professional. He sought fame. He cannot complain that he has succeeding in achieving his desires.

He adjusts his chin and his shoulders and smiles warmly.

His bladder objects.

Honestly, Carson doesn't mind the discomfort.

Physical discomfort ties him to the show.

It reminds him of the days when performing was as fulfilling as conducting a symphony.

When he would laugh at real mistakes.

When he would make mistakes.

King of Late Night Television. Best dressed man in America. The most likeable man in the country. Trusted by millions.

Only Walter Conkrite beat him on honesty ratings.

His *Burfie* is flashing yellow: "Go! Go! Go!"

Nowhere to go.

That was the problem. Once you're on the top, there is nowhere to go.

Nothing to look forward to except losing what he'd already gained.

Always looking down and never up. Fending off the competition -- erstwhile friends.

Focused on avoiding loss instead of creating.

Prodded, not encouraged. Pushed, not pulled. His smile became automatic: his whole body a lie. "Let this night be over," he thought while he laughed and said, "Oh, come on… Not really." Or some other automatic line.

He was no more than a mouse pushing a lever for a laugh.

The man was no longer there. Only the performer.

Polished. That's what Joanne called it. "You look so good on the outside, you never know what's on the inside," she said when she divorced him.

Joanne received the highest divorce settlement in the nation that year.

And that wasn't enough to absolve his pain.

Now Carson feels like he woke up and everything is bright again.

So: He can't complain about people loving him.

"Here's Johnny!" "Here's Johnny!" the people echo as they jostle to get closer to him.

Johnny Carson holds up his hands and says:

Yes, yes…
You all sound very much like Ed McMahon… As good as he ever did.

But the opening theme has changed.
It is no longer "Here's Johnny"

But: "Where's Johnny?"

Or maybe: "What's Johnny?"

His words are repeated by *Burfies* through imbedded buds up and down the concourse. It's progress can be tracked by human chuckles moving away from him like a wave on a shore.

The professionally modulated voice of a broadcaster stands out from the cacophony:

"Mr. Carson, I see by your *Burfie* that you are very motivated right now. Flashing yellow! As Emcee of the Sons of Liberty Convention, what is your immediate objective?"

"To get moving."

*Burfie*s bleep in unison: *Mobilize the herd. Set the nation in motion.*

"Mr. Carson, what is your objective for this convention?"

"Honestly—I just need to go," Carson says, motioning with his chin to the pictogram in front of him – the man and an arrow. So close…

*Burfie*s report: *Driven to rescue the nation.*

"And how will you accomplish that?"

"That won't be a problem. It'll be done as soon as I get through the door."

Plan in motion. Expects smooth and swift action at the first opportunity.

"What will the result be?"

"Instant relief!"

"You've been under considerable pressure?"

"Indeed, I have."

Expects instant relief of tension.

"If you do encounter resistance?"

"I'll just push until it's done."

Willing to exert force if necessary.

"And if things collapse?"

"Then someone better open a window."

Transparency and the cleansing wind of liberty.

"What is your primary goal, Mr. Carson?"

He breaks. "Look… I just want everyone to get out of my way and let me go!"

The news report is twittered around the world instantaneously:

Johnny Carson, Emcee of the Reunion of the SOL of NY, declares a 2nd Revolution to vent the chamber-- admit a fresh flow where putrid air is now trapped. He vows to plunge right in to unclog resistance, excrete the binding strands of tyranny, and flush away the slimy corruption.
He will not store public papers in the bathroom.
He is willing to use force. "I am prepared to push," he promised.
"We need to rise up and go!" he thundered.
The Great National Mobilization has begun!

Some *Burfie*s report: Approval: *unanimous*.
Integrity: *unquestioned*.

Others report to the Headless Horseman and his Big Beautiful Government.

Then, all *Burfie*s announce the beginning of the next session and direct their humans accordingly. The crowd disappears.

Carson pivots back towards that blessed corridor.

He opens the first door he sees.

Wrong door.

The red warning light over the studio door begins to flash: "On air."

The Reverend Doctor John Rodgers stands before a tiny audience holding his Bible.

"There is no beginning before today," he says.

As Johnny Carson enters, John Rodgers repeats:

There is no beginning before today.
Today is all there is.

You are where you are. You can be no where else.

Your choices begin today.

And every choice you make changes the course of your life.

Including the decision to make no change at all.

An opportunity passed is like an off--ramp you failed to take.
You can reverse your course, find another way to get there, or

abandon your goal. But you can never undo that which no longer exists.

So be wary.
Recognize the off ramps and choose your course wisely.

This is not metaphysics.

But physics.

Johnny Carson backs out into the corridor only to find that a cleaning cart is now blocking the door to the men's room.

He is planning to ignore the sign and barge in anyway, when a boy tugs on him. "Sir! Sir, you're already late! Come! You must come!"

He is pulling Carson.

As soon as Carson is away from the sign, the boy whispers: "That cart's a decoy. To catch desperados."

They wouldn't arrest me, thinks Carson.

He knows its true. It's just one of those things he knows. He isn't the type of man to be harassed.

He's not the type man caught. Or prosecuted.

It must be his *Burfie* setting.

Carson follows the boy into the crowd.

"Where's the script?" he asks the boy.

Of course, the boy is gone.

And Johnny Carson is standing in the Cathedral.

He has a mic in his hand and the red light is on.

Why should he be surprised?

Johnny Carson makes a beeline for the podium – or pulpit… What is he supposed to say in a Cathedral?

Keynote Speech

A Cathedral.

Looking around, the Reverend Doctor John Rodgers is certain that he is standing in the old Trinity Church – the one the rebels burned as they retreated from Manhattan in 1776.

He is a holy man who believes in God's infinite powers.

But…

A church that is burned does not resurrect itself.

Most likely, he has forgotten something significant.

A bridge: that one piece of information that changes chaos into order. A bridge explains how one comes to be where one is when the stream is impossible to cross.

In sixty years as a preacher, he had internalized many sermons and lessons. This one is his "Saint Simon" lesson: *A bridge over troubled water.*

Usually given when he was urging patience…

Often to young lovers.

He would tell them:

There will be many times in life, when you are separated from your desires by raging waters you cannot cross.

You see where you want to be. Where you should be. Where you could be…Where you ought to be…
But for that raging stream….

You cannot cross by yourself. You cannot cross at this spot.
You cannot cross now.
You need a bridge.

Because -- however close it may look to be -- the goal is impossible to attain right now.

But that does not mean you are lost or that your goal cannot be achieved.

You are not tied to this spot. You are not tied to this time.
Today will be gone and you will be somewhere else tomorrow.

Time and space evolve like the moon and the sun.
Sometimes they eclipse at the least expected time, and a bridge appears across troubled water.

You have your own will. You are free to choose your path.
To decide what you do now.

God does not tell you how to respond to the challenges you face -- except to offer strength and hope and help in ways you may never see.

Your parents cannot choose your path for you.
No outside voice can speak for you.
No one but you takes the next step.

Nor is anyone else responsible for the choice you make.

You, and you alone must decide: What do you do right now?

You can abandon the desire -- an option which should always be considered. Perhaps what you desire is not the best for you.
Only you know that. No one else.

You can build a bridge.
Consider the materials, time, and cost, and set forth to achieve for your goal.
Bring into existence those things that make your dream possible.

Set out to meet the challenges of Hercules.
Many amazing results have come from this.

Or you can walk on… See what happens next.
Hold on to the desire and keep moving along the paths you are shown.

Trust that there will be a bridge in the future.
If a bridge you should have.

Nothing is achieved by avoidance and indecision.

He always ended the session the same way:

The truth is inside you. Meditate. Pray. Ask God to show you your path, and your path will come your way.

However…

In all of those discussions of bridges, he never considered that one might appear on the other side of a river with no memory of choice… No bridge… no boat… no journey…

He has no explanation for his presence here.

His memory must have dropped a bridge.

Or his eyes cannot be trusted.

For, clearly, here he is -- in Trinity Cathedral, which burned in 1776.

He had walked its ruins on Evacuation Day.

A day of celebration for generations to follow, but a day of bittersweet sadness for those who returned to Manhattan after eight years of British Occupation.

His two churches had been destroyed and desecrated -- used to house pigs and hens.

And this beautiful cathedral had been only broken walls and wild roses.

Perfume and thorns…

He'd been so overcome by sorrow that he sank down in tears and was poked by a thorn – making him stand up very abruptly.

And making him laugh.

Count on God to send a thorn when he thought he might rest…

No time to mourn, he thought. "Our work is great, our time is short, and our reward is glorious!"

That old church is surely gone. But its air even smells of Trinity Cathedral.

Not the perfume of fresh roses, but the earthy smell of incense. The sweet resin of Frankincense. The musky heat of Myrrh.

His own church smelled of sweaty dirty people.

He'd heard that many times from visitors in velvet.

From his own congregation, he wouldn't listen to complaints about other churches. He turned the topic to the wonders of the variety of God.

He would say:

Isn't it amazing?
That God allows so many choices!

Why is everyone not filled with wonder?

If a cup would suffice, why have a mug?
If a daisy gives pollen, why have a rose?
If one man were perfect, why make two?.

If God wanted only one way, God would not have given us a compass.

This was a common refrain. Plucked from his brain at least three times a week.

It didn't matter how often he said it or how many ways he said it -- they never seemed to fully understand.

How one creation could be so diverse. One creation. A whole. Not separate. Interdependent.

How God looks from too far away to see these petty divisions. The difference are for us -- not God.

It seemed so obvious to him. If there is no void, then there is no break in our connection.

If a chunk is taken from an apple, the whole fruit rots.

So: what is separate anyway? Is a leg separate from an arm?

Can a wagon wheel survive without a spoke?

The untimely death of a butterfly can change the future.

Interdependence and variety.

Even so..

John Rodgers considers himself open-minded and willing to learn and change his positions.

But there is variety…

… and the unbending rules of nature.

This church is gone. No one can build a bridge to the past.

Even so… This sanctuary looks exactly as he remembers.

Whether dream or delusion -- it is beautiful.

The air sparkles in rainbow motes from the windows of stained glass, and specks of colored light fall upon the solid walnut pews rubbed smooth by fellowship.

In the front, separated by a railing, is the altar where, between two candles, a golden Jesus hangs on a cross at the moment of his greatest humiliation and failure.

John Rodgers looks away.

The crucifix.

Though born in America, he inherited the immigrant's aversion to icons and, especially, this one: Where the man who came to save the world is gibbeted with thieves.

The implicit -- even explicit -- message: The Romans win. They killed your God. And got you to blame the Jews.

John Rodgers shudders and touches the cross on his chest.

The Roman church spread that image throughout Europe and enforced submission to it with velvet robes and staves. They forced people to bow to

their fallen God in his humiliation. And to kneel before a man in velvet who either gave a blessing in blood and body of Christ or pulled their tongue in punishment. They spit in baby's mouths and called it a blessing.

This is how the Romans used Jesus.

This crucifix.

This is not John Rodgers's Jesus.

Not the Jesus who defeated England.

His Jesus is a rebel.

His Jesus gives him strength -- not to endure suffering but to wield a righteous flaming sword to avoid and alleviate it.

The crucifix was the crux of the whole war.

No King. No Pope.

A triumphant Jesus!

In Manhattan, the war of independence began in the churches.

In 1765 -- the year of the Stamp Act.

That year John Rodgers arrived in Manhattan to assume the pulpit of the Presbyterian church.

And Charles Inglis arrived in Manhattan to assume the pulpit of this church -- Trinity Cathedral.

Their crosses crossed immediately.

Entering a conflict already a hundred years old.

In 1664, when Peter Stuyvesant ceded Dutch New Amsterdam to the Duke of York, he negotiated charters for the Dutch churches. And forced the English to agree to religious tolerance.

The king agreed, but the Church of England never gave up their dream of religious uniformity.

For ten years -- from 1765 until 1776 -- the king and the Church of England refused to recognize the existence of the Presbyterians in Manhattan.

The Presbyterian congregation could not own a church. Denied a charter of incorporation from the king, they could not buy property, pay salaries, or even disburse charity in the name of the church.

There were no legal Presbyterians in Manhattan.

They were all undocumented.

Their church was titled in the name of a parishioner. The congregation had no legal power if he had decided to take possession of the building.

The minister could not be paid by the church. He was paid by a parishioner who gathered the money from the congregants.

An endowment of thousands of dollars was denied widows and orphans because it was given in the name of the Wall Street Presbyterian Church.

No such church existed. The lawyer kept the money.

Thirty-five petitions. Thirty-five denials.

And -- at the heart of the denials -- was Charles Inglis -- who was hoping to be the first Bishop of Manhattan.

It was a power struggle.

But there was no power balance.

The Presbyterians had no power.

Charles Inglis and Trinity Cathedral had

the ear of the king.

And the purse of the king.

Good standing in the Church of England was required to do business with the government. To perform work in the service of the government.

And they were the city's majority.

On Sunday mornings, two-thirds of Manhattan was deposited on the steps of Trinity Cathedral. Carriages with footmen, children with muffs, women with feathers in their caps…

And all of the people who made the laws, enforced the laws, and adjudicated the laws.

The aristocracy attended the Church of England in Trinity Cathedral -- the people most invested in maintaining the status quo in power.

Judges were Episcopalians;

lawyers were Presbyterians.

The Episcopalians came from the English.

The Presbyterians from the Scots.

Fortunately for Manhattan -- the Dutch set the ethos in Manhattan. Men of business. Persuaded by numbers.

They were impatient with Scots and English.

They just required both to sign a contract.

John Rodgers's Presbyterians were

Ten percent of Manhattan's population;

And 90% of the Sons of Liberty.

They arose from generations of dissenters, nonconformists, separatists, Puritans, independents, Brownists, anabaptists, fanatics, enthusiasts, schismatics, and sectaries.

Whose ancestors -- men, women, and children -- were mowed down in the fields by horses. Stripped of land and rendered homeless by the nobles with title bought from the king. These were people who refused to stick out their tongues for a priest.

They had endured two months between decks to arrive in America. Upon arrival they suffered up to 80% deaths from disease and war.

Showered with broken promises, they were subjected to military rule and slavery.

Yet, they never lost the idea that they were entitled to respect --

to have thoughts, ideas, and plans for themselves independent of their master's needs.

They came to America to be kings and queens of their own opinions.

This promise is carried in their cells.

Their religion did not make them difficult.

They were too diverse to agree on any point of religious merit and too smart to realize such an effort was futile.

What made them difficult

was their internal focus.

They looked inside before they looked outside.

And in their inside, they always had --

First: self-responsibility.

As a promise, a curse, and an obligation.

Responsibility was not a thing to be shifted -- but to be carried and delivered.

It was unthinkable that one would claim someone else responsible for a duty he had assumed himself.

He was the one who undertook the promise. It, then, became an obligation -- and, often, a curse.

They did not look to others for advice, comfort, or direction until they had already looked inside to find the answers they could accept.

His congregation was a blessing and curse.

A blessing because miracles were not demanded of God.

A curse because miracles were demanded of men.

.

Add to his challenge:

His congregation were Scots.

Ungovernable. In Scotland, a king lasted only until the next babe was born to be crowned king

and paraded through Edinburgh as an idol for the nobles.

A Scot will stand his ground before a carriage with four horses if his honor is challenged. He would rather be dead than lose his integrity.

Power is might and might is power. The Lords of the Congregation were a violent bunch who stabbed the young queen's singer -- 50 blows, one for each Lord of the Congregation -- and murdered her beloved husband.

The means justify the end.

Untrustworthy. Their internal compass was often turned to money rather than honor. As when they took money from Queen Elizabeth while swearing loyalty to Queen Mary.

The English were certain of their superiority.

They were God's chosen people. King James' Bible proves it -- given that he was such a model example of a human being.

Everything that happened proved it true.

Since they controlled the legislature, the governorship, and the courts.

With such power, they always looked powerful.

They had the whips.

They had the fines.

They had the prisons.

They had the mercenaries.

The Scots, on the hand, had pure chaos.

They were fireworks shooting in the air -- men of great passion and short endurance. Leaping at

leaves and feathers with the confidence of a cougar. Ready to prove willingness at any time…

They had their cool shrewd lawyers in the lead, but the power was in the mob willing to tar and feather anyone who disagreed.

And John Rodgers was their pastor.

Also a Scot.

John Rodgers admits to few vanities, but he does acknowledge a certain mastery over his people. Not by arguing with them or trying to convince them.

He'd never win that way.

Too many lawyers…

But he always won.

…because he never told anyone what he thought.

Except for those subjects on which he was outwardly biased and passionate, he'd rarely allow an opinion or judgment or discernment to pass his lips.

Whatever the issue: "I'm still praying on that," he would say.

And who could argue with that?

Could they say "Hurry up and pray already!"?

Could they claim that God's advice was not needed?

Did they honestly believe he prayed about whether Mabel's pie was better than Sally's?

Sometimes he hid a wicked chuckle. It was worth the collar to shut them up.

They were sharply divided.

Spitting angry.

He'd refused their offer to come to Manhattan twice before 1765 when he relented. The Synod pressured him with promises of usefulness…

And no one else would take the pulpit.

Somebody had to do it.

John Rodgers never failed to fill the empty places.

The big issue of that day revolved about the place and timing of the opening prayer.

Those with pews closest to the front of the church -- the First Class Pews -- contended that the opening prayer should take place in front of them -- before the preacher ascended the pulpit.

Who could imagine the pulpit being touched by uncleansed hands?

This issue was of heavenly importance. Enough to break church apart. Men with canes crossed and women with their arms crossed.

The pulpit is a sacred place and, therefore, one should already be clean before one is carried to God's lofty heights.

A dirty man should not touch its stairs.

A shower of disinfectant comes from the opening prayer. It prepares the supplicant to open himself and invite in the spirit.

With spirit intact, the preacher can ascend the pulpit to talk to everyone else.

Besides: They paid a lot of money for First Class Pews.

The First Classers were very direct (no reason not to be honest when you can buy yourself out of consequences):

You Presbyterians don't offer protection from hell or God's wrath….
The least you should do is honor the hierarchy of pews.

An excellent point, John Rodgers thought. They didn't even have a reliable "how to" model. Just a "you know it when you feel it" and "I feel it."

So this would be

a simple matter

except…

A prayer said on the floor of the church is heard and seen only by those who occupy the First Class Pews.

While there is not a curtain between coach and First Class -- there are hats.

That's why the pulpit is raised.

The 5% First Class, alone, would see this spirit arrive and fill the preacher.

Equality! the populous argued.

Always the call of the losers. Whine whine whine.

Equal opportunity! the First Class Pews answered.

They know all about it:

They seized the opportunity.

Money trumps all.

Anyone can buy a pew.

You, too, can be a millionaire!

See O'Liargram for details.

You, too, are just a pew away…

We did it.

You can, too.

And, if you don't, it's not our problem.

Only the winner is heard.

The First Classers argued strenuously that it is a restriction to liberty to prevent a man from buying the advantages of his hard work.

The First Classer earned it!

He earned it. His own bathroom. The jet. The chauffeur.

He put in that time.

Not like all those whining maids, waiters, nurses, gardeners all those other lazy immigrants.

Still, the world requires money.

And some people have more than others.

And those who have more must always contribute at least something to those who have less.

Trickle down economics, they called it.

If you keep a little trickle going, no one complains. They think they're getting a fair share.

But, business is business.

Money is the best we have to exchange.

And no one would claim that everything is of equal value.

Therefore: there must be some advantages to those who have more.

Some parishioners are more special than others because they carry a larger burden of supporting the congregation.

Those who pay more should get more: That's the American way!

Money trumps all.

John Rodgers said, "I'm praying on it."

"We're preying on it, too…" He thought he heard someone say.

But there's no reason to believe anyone was listening.

Now he has lost his train of prayer….

Oh, yes.

The board begged that he keep First Class happy.

"I'm still praying on it," John Rodgers said

to everyone who asked --

and everyone did…

His plan undisclosed:

That first day in Manhattan, in 1765, the church was full. The bells stopped ringing. Children were on shoulders, women pressed against each other, boys on the floor… Everyone was waiting.

With only his Bible in hand, John Rodgers, stepped out from the back of the church.

He walked forward.

Total silence. Not even a baby cried.

He stopped in front of the First Class Pews. He tipped his hat, gave a broad smile, wiggled his shoulders and looked like a captain in control of his jet.

He nodded and shook hands with those First Class people -- smiling at the women with an extra wink and chucking it up with the men. Kissing babies before brushing them away.

Only then did he mount the pulpit to be a preacher of God.

The First Class Pews were beaming… Wallets were bulging from pockets and women were beating their husbands to bid for the next pew.

At the top of the pulpit, John Rodgers paused. He looked out at the congregation -- sweeping his eyes to feel every soul.

To ensure that every person felt seen.

And, only then, did he begin the opening prayer.

John Rodgers, the man, was pragmatic.

John Rodgers, the preacher, was not.

No one would be deprived of prayer.

But that didn't mean he didn't understand the politics of a church.

There was no negotiation.

He might be wrong about what God would want.

How could he ever be sure his prayers were answered by God and not his own will, or, God forbid, Satan himself?

Still, it was all he had….

What *he* felt was right.

He didn't know more than anyone else

but he did always assume there would be a thorn in his buttocks when he was wrong.

John Rodgers shakes his head again.

He is grateful to have lived in such interesting times.

But, here he is right now...

Still in Trinity Cathedral -- a place that cannot exist. And there is no bridge in his mind to tell him how he came to be here…

"Burfie hello."

John Rodgers turns to see Martha Washington entering the vestibule.

"Dr. Rodgers!" she says.

"Martha? My dear Mrs. Washington! How are you, dear Madam?"

He bows to her and takes her gloved hand for a kiss.

She smiles. "Welcome to the First Annual Reunion of the Sons of Liberty of New York, Reverend Doctor."

"How is it annual if it is the first?" he asks. "Or a reunion if there has been no union?"

"A man of God should ask fewer questions and focus on faith," she answers.

"That's your religion," he replies.

"Ah, yes," she answers. "I recall that yours has no answers."

Her voice is as young as it was when he first met her. She was tiny next to George. Fit under his arm. But ever in control.

A lady of grace and manners.

Like her husband: the best of aristocracy.

"Do pardon me, Madam, if I stare too long. I am slightly disoriented, I fear. Must be age."

"Everyone is disoriented in the Cathedral, Doctor," she says. "You'll soon be comfortable. One forgets the questions, and, then, no longer concerns himself with the absence of answers."

"To be relieved of questions, could be a mercy, indeed."

"Clarity can be an equal burden," she replies. Then she asks: "Do you know why you are here?"

"That, indeed, has been the quest of my lifetime. Pray, do tell me, Madam, do you have this answer? Why am I here? I will be very distressed if I should have been an Episcopalian after all!"

"You submitted the winning question: *Who in the Herd is Heard?*"

"When did I do that?" John Rodgers asks.

"*When* is a dimension I don't really understand."

“I, too, am somewhat disoriented and confused,” John Rodgers admitted.

“Yes. You must forget why you are here,” Martha Washington replies.

“Why am I here?”

“To be surprised.”

“Am I to interpret that to mean that you know no more than I?”

They smile at one another.

“Do you remember when we had the answers?” she asks.

“Yes. But that’s only because we forgot the questions, isn’t it?”

“Maybe that’s just life. Seen only for itself at a distance.”

“During states of confusion,” says Rodgers.

“Be prepared for the unexpected, Doctor.”

No difficult task for me, Madam.
I can do nothing more than trust the Author.
I surrender the illusion of control.
Even when the chapter begins in confusion,
and the interior is incomprehensible,
and the settings unbelievable,
and the speech ridiculous...
and the speech too long…
and the speech way too long…

My path is not mine to choose, but the Author’s to reveal.

“That is the perfect mindset for the Cathedral,” she says.

“Ah, so the Cathedral is a Calvinist, after all?”

Martha Washington laughs softly. "No. Afraid not. We Episcopalians believe that God also appreciates beauty."

"Then God must, indeed, appreciate you."

"Eternity has not reduced your charm, I see," she says.

Now Martha Washington straightens and pulls back. She reaches into her carpet bag.

"I suspect you will not like this," she says.

She hands him a polished walnut jewelry box with an eagle sitting on the liberty pole held up by the Headless Horseman and inset in gold.

"It's very beautiful," John Rodgers says -- cautious only because of her warning. An eagle? It was supposed to be a turkey. Did she think he cared about that?

He wasn't certain why a Headless Horseman was holding up the liberty pole…

But, then… The box begins to feel heavier. Or it vibrates. There's something alive inside it.

Of sorts.

He feels it.

He does not want to open the box.

John Rodgers looks at Martha Washington.

She says: "You have been called and you are needed. But, without the *Burfie*, you cannot come to this convention. It is the key to the Cathedral."

Then she added: "You must have this around your neck. And you must agree to obey it's instructions."

From all around an announcer says;

Federal law requires that you:
Check your *Burfie*s regularly to determine your individual rights and responsibilities.
Know your place. Unless your *Burfie* is designated private by the Headless Horseman, you must follow laws.
For your safety and security.
Federal law requires your compliance with all information signs, posted placards, and verbal instructions from Darth Vader.
Failure to immediately respond to any instruction -- reasonable or not -- will result in removal, fines, transportation to a foreign country where our laws don't apply, or such further measures as are judged necessary to preserve order in the Big Beautiful Government as perceived by the Headless Horseman.
Federal law also requires that you display your *Burfie* at all times.

"Can you agree to that?" Martha Washington asks.

"Can you repeat it?" asks John Rodgers.

Martha Washington says: "You need to promise to obey and take a loyalty oath."

"A loyalty oath?" John Rodgers asks. "To whom?"

"The Headless Horseman."

"Oh, fine, then. I thought it was a real person."

"Absolutely not," says Martha Washington.

John Rodgers steps back and leans against the wall -- hardly aware he needed support. He stares at the thing.

He feels the life inside it.

This box is an abomination.

John Rodgers has an immigrant's fear of icons in all their forms -- as objects, ideas and people. The 3 I's. Icons, ideology, and idols.

Not the I's of God but the means by which men wield God's power.

John Rodgers is not an ascetic, by any means.

Vanity forces him to admit to pride. He cannot deny his love of elegance. Washington Irving publicly mocked his meticulous dress, French-powdered wig, and gold-tipped cane. Noted that he dined with gold-leafed china from Italy and crystal goblets made in Ireland.

Nor does he deny himself comfort. He gladly takes comfort when comfort is offered. And it was offered constantly… He dined at least once a year with every family in his church.

It shows in the bulge beneath his coat.

But all of this has nothing to do with God.

God is on the inside.

Many people struggle with this, Rodgers knows. Inside his head is a library of automatic responses to doubt from a lifetime of parishioners' questions.

He, too, has a lifetime of questions.

But he never doubted.

He didn't always understand -- he often didn't understand. To be fair, he rarely understood.

But he feels God inside him the way a mother must feel a baby.

Perhaps one day they will find that it is a tumor, after all…

That's the way his God works… Laughing all the time…

John Rodgers wears a cross around his neck.

It is not an icon.

It is a physical reminder of the separation between the outside and the inside.

A reminder

> to gather information from outside…
> but to weigh it from the inside.

His cross reminds him to meditate and question. To pray. To wait.

And above all: To trust. To be patient.

His cross reminds him that the truth of God is inside him.

That is the opposite of an idol, an icon, or a dogma which is always interpreted by someone else.

The 3 I's take the force of God and direct it to achieve its own goals.

An ideology provides the slogans.
An icon provides the symbols.
And the idol provides the flame thrower.

The 3's are always used for power.
And the power is always controlled by the idol.

John Rodgers recognizes the temptation to seize upon icons, ideology or idols. They all provide answers.

God is not an easy master. Unclear in instructions, purpose, and feedback. God does not tell a man what to do. God offers ideas and a man selects that which resonates with his soul.

Free will is God's curse and blessing.

An icon, ideology, or idol is the opposite.

One way. One answer. One person. A single source for all decisions.

A place on which to rest the doubt and uncertainty.

A binary response to every issue.

Everything fits into one of two boxes: Pro & Anti…

> Pro-choice. Pro-life. Pro-guns. Pro-kings. Pro-headless horseman. Anti-headless horseman.

Every sight that is seen, every word that is heard, and every fact that is gathered is thrown into one of these boxes.

And then the box becomes so heavy, it cannot be moved.

And, because it has been evoked so often by so many people, people believe it.

And, so many people believe it, that it must be true.

Truth by majority. Truth by vote.

The 3 I's take the most powerful force in the universe -- human attention -- and control it.

John Rodgers likens attention to a lightning rod.

Drawing God's power from the inside and focusing it on the outside.

He always gave the same example. Stand on the sidewalk in Manhattan and stare up at a tree. Soon you will be joined by others. And the more who join you, the more certain everyone is -- that there is something to see.

That is how an icon, an ideology, and an idol control people.

Either the self is trusted. Or someone else.

If everyone is laughing -- it must be funny. If everyone feels that way -- it must be true. If this is how everyone does it -- it must be the way to do it. If the algorithm or the test or the judgment is thus, it must be accurate. If everyone thinks he's a genius, he must be a genius.

An emperor could walk nude down Fifth Avenue and no one would comment.

Under the influence of the 3 I's, individual choice and opinion is abrogated for the false god.

Enough to drink poisoned Kool-Aid, bring a plane and its passengers to their death, murder families in their homes, set fire to teepees, and use rifles to wreck mayhem on people just living their lives.

The most worthy cause can become a dogma.

It is dogma when doubt is squelched because everyone else must be right and your feelings must be wrong.

It is dogma when questions are discouraged, and contradictory evidence is disparaged, ignored, ridiculed or called “fake news.”

It is dogma when obedience is demanded and loyalty is required -- because obedience and loyalty -- both -- are values triggered only when the conscience is pricked. Acts consistent with internal values do not rely on claims of loyalty or obedience. These are evoked only when the internal inclination is to decline.

It is a dogma when there is only one way and no deviation.

It is a dogma when flaws are ignored; failures are excused; lies are claimed to be true; and obedience and loyalty are the watchwords of the vigilant.

John Rodgers knows that Martha Washington is still here. But she is not waiting. Time, in the Cathedral, is external -- not internal. The parade of physical changes is irrelevant inside the Cathedral. Wake and sleep is only a matter of focus.

The 3 I’s are lightning rods for human attention -- the most powerful force in the universe.

Focus attention on getting to the moon, and it is achieved in decade.

Focus attention on building a cathedral, and it is continued through generations.

Focus attention on hatred, and people are murdered.

But the 3 I's do not simply demand attention -- they require worship.

The difference between love and worship is like the difference between new lovers and a bonded couple.

To worship is to concentrate one's energy intensely on a single icon, idol, or ideology. To commit oneself to the I outside and ignore the I inside.

Like directing a sunbeam with a mirror -- the energy of the love becomes destructive.

An addiction instead of a focus.

Worship concentrates love into a laser. Limits light to only a single band.

Worship and love are very different.

Love is not greedy or jealous. Love does not demand obedience.

Love includes all the colors in the rainbow.

Love spills out like water to flow all around.

Love is the impulse to create, to unite, to help, to join, to bring together, to be close to, to desire…

Love is a connection from which people draw strength and comfort. A warmth that sustains and never dies.

Love comes from the soul.

That part of every person that is linked inextricably to everything else. There is no void.

Without a void, there is no division. With no division, there is no separation.

Love comes from the soul. The connection to the creation and God and humanity.

While not "inside" in the sense of an organ, it is in every cell of the body.

From this soul, comes the guidance of God.

Love brings together.

Worship separates.

Thus: One cannot, at the same time, focus on an idol and God.

Either the idol or God is getting the attention.

By definition obedience to an icon or ideology or idol is separating one's self from God.

It is looking to someone else for answers instead of seeking the soul inside.

John Rodgers understands why people need icons, idols, and ideology.

Just as the best attack dogs were the friendliest puppies, the most vulnerable are the best of us.

People

whose love is overflowing,
passion unrestrained.

People who burn with the desire

to make a difference,
to do something worthwhile
to make their lives meaningful.

This beautiful and pure motivation -- passion and love and the desire to do something meaningful -- is directed by the idol to hate and anger. To destruction. To separation and division.

Motivated by abundant love
they abandon their souls and
become pawns, clones, and sycophants.

It is empty meaning they bring to their lives.

Waved from poles, carried in parades, placed behind candles… Used to lead men in war. Holy crusades of murder in the name of God. People slaughtered for defiling an object. Men kneeling to men.

No one can destroy, hurt, hate and malign others and still claim to love.

If they escape the idol, they return with their empathy strands tattered and torn.

There is nothing inherently wrong with ideas, people, or objects…

These are the stuff of life.

All there is.

And Rodgers loves them all.

But he could never idolize another man. Even Jesus, to him, is a guide to God and not the way to God.

John Rodgers has been among the giants of his time and no man has always been right.

When he chose to support men -- which he often did -- it was because his own moral compass was already aligned with the direction they undertake.

Not because man is better able to decide what Rodgers should do.

Only Rodgers and the God within makes that decision.

Otherwise he'd be no more than a headless horseman…

John Rodgers cherishes objects as well.

There are many he would mourn if lost.

Peter's stuffed bear brings him to tears for his precious boy who never became a man. Elizabeth's hairbrush makes him smile, remembering the evenings he sat and watched while she brushed her long luxurious hair. His father's pocket watch.

His life is full of meaningful objects.

The repository of his memories.

But his life -- and the soul within -- is far more valuable than any object.

Ideology. A much more difficult I.

Is it even possible to claim freedom from ideology?

The shape of the mind is molded by ideas.

So fundamental to our view of the world that we can't see them at all. We are all blind to ourselves. No man can see his own nose.

To him, the difference between an ideology and an idea is that an idea is a single point.

John Rodgers risked his life many times for America. He gave a treasonous sermon in front of British soldiers. He was sought as an enemy of the king.

He was risking his life for LIFE – liberty, independence, freedom and equality.

Surely, an ideology.

But based on creation -- not destruction.

Union -- not division.

The betterment of others -- not plundering for himself.

It is a thin line, John Rodgers admits.

He has an ideology. Absolute values that he would place above his own life. Honesty. Integrity. Kindness.

He would rather die than lose these.

He would not be himself without them.

But, while absolute in the idea -- it cannot be absolute in its administration, procurement, or maintenance.

It is an idea -- not a thing.

It is a road. A direction A goal. Never fully achieved.

Like everything, it exists on a gradient. Absent a gradient, there is either infinity or void.

An idea becomes an ideology when one believes it is more than idea -- a goal -- a concept that, with hard work, determination, patience, and unflagging energy -- may come to fruition.

But -- in the hands of an idol with his icon -- an ideology kills people.

It is used to turn the creative force of love, passion, and the desire to be useful into a reason for

Anger

Hate.

Exile.

Murder.

Those who wield the power of icons -- never seem to make things better.

They do not gather people together to fix what is broken. To pray for it to be repaired and healed.

Instead they focus the anger and hate they create

to encourage people to whack a mole

and tar-and-feather dissenters.

It is so simple to John Rodgers.

Attention is the seed.

Give it away and the conscience is silent. The soul is empty.

Worship bends that attention to a single shape.

Obedience follows

And, inevitably, obedience leads to destruction.

The 3 I's are the gun of the soul.

John Rodgers looks down now at this object.

This monstrosity doesn't even disguise its gaudy purpose.

On fake purple velvet lies a large plastic medallion of the Headless Horseman -- mounted on a white horse with a yellow mane -- his head in one hand and his reins in the other. A red tie flaps against his nose. His hand holds a liberty pole. The gold on his hands is flaking all around.

The mouth is button that says: "Push me."

The liberty pole has a flag that says: "1775 was a beautiful year."

Rodgers pushes the button and hears:

"*We did more than they did." "I had more people at my inauguration than George Washington!" "It's not so great to be first. I was better!*" "*My GNP was higher than George's!" "I didn't have any Benedict Arnold's in my army…"*

Rodgers shuts the lid and hands the box back to Martha Washington, shaking his head.

She says, "I'll fix that."

She takes off her glove. "*Why don't they just take off the gloves?" "Sure, one side advocates murder and mayhem, but they're still good people because they worship me." "My call was perfect. I am perfect."*

Martha Washington pushes something on her large watch and the medallion bursts out: "*You're fired!*"

Then, it goes silent.

Martha Washington gloves her hand again and returns the box to Rodgers. "Sometimes it gets stuck on Dog News. Won't stop barking. That won't happen again."

"I do not want this," Rodgers says pulling back his hand as she tries to return it.

Martha Washington gives him that look that women give him when a statement needs to be reconsidered and they will have their way.

John Rodgers ducks his head and closes his eyes. "I'm praying on it," he says.

Burfie is intended to be an icon, certainly. And it is dangerous.

But that is not his risk.

This monstrosity will never be anything but an abomination to him. It repels him. It will never control his God-force inside him. His soul is safe.

But there is the issue of obedience. Obedience is an external act, a physical act...

He is being asked to put his body under the command of another man.

As virtues, none are lower than obedience and loyalty. In fact, they cannot be considered virtues at all.

Because -- at their very heart -- is the abrogation of the soul and the voice within.

When a man is given an instruction that does not prick the conscience -- loyalty and obedience are unnecessary. Doing the right thing is causes no dissonance.

Obedience is triggered only when the conscience is pricked. Only when the soul says, "No!"

Then, obedience sets its thumb upon the neck and says: "You will do as you are told."

Loyalty, too, is a matter of negative choice. A person to whom loyalty is freely given, never asks. Never needs to. Loyalty is given out of love and respect.

Loyalty, as a value -- a reason for acting, is triggered only when there is nothing else left. When the lies are obvious. The promises are broken. The disappointment profound.

Then: only loyalty is left to explain your support.

Those who give up their self-hood for obedience are no more than a tool. An object with no self-will. Fungible like money. People who will all act under a single command regardless of their own personal feelings.

Clones with silenced souls and marching orders.

Obedience and loyalty always involve the negation of individual responsibility: I did it because another man told me to... Just following instructions. Acting in official capacity. Following the law. Everyone else does it.

No self-respect because no self-agency.

The soul and the self were given away to another person to control.

John Rodgers is not at risk of this.

In his entire life, only a handful of times did he act against his better judgment.

And he always regretted it.

Now, John Rodgers smiles to himself.

He is splitting hairs to avoid what is inevitable.

He has been called.

He has pledged his life to service.

Though he may know no more of the future than this: he knows he will not refuse to be useful when he is needed.

And, if faith has any power at all, it is that one must:

choose sight and avoid blindness;
choose truth and avoid ignorance;
choose usefulness and avoid sloth.

One must not waste an opportunity to learn—
no matter how bitter the lesson might be.

John Rodgers takes the box and opens it again,
his hands slippery and cold and shaking.
It weighs nothing.
As light as balsa wood but as firm as oak.
Unnaturally white.
Whiter than the Queen's china.
Too smooth. Too even.
Neither lead nor lime produces this color.
Lacquered wax, perhaps.
Or an alchemical varnish.
An indigo glaze.
No. This is not natural.

But it is just human made. Hasn't he already given it more power that it deserves?

"I'm praying on it," he says.

Martha Washington says:

You wrote the letter to the soldiers for the Synod in 1776.

Perhaps you need to be reminded of a time in your history when you were asked: Is this a cause for which you will send my son to die?

Do you recall what you told them?

Of course he does.

He had prayed and suffered over that sermon --

> Torn between that desperate need to tell the truth -- you will probably die --
>
> and still inspire: but do it anyway.

What an awesome burden that had been!

It was a letter drawn from the deepest recesses of his soul.

He believed, with all his heart, that he had given the best he had to give.

And when the boys died who had heard his words, he hoped he had given them the strength and courage to prepare themselves for death while still alive.

"You need only listen to yourself," Martha says.

The box in his hand vibrates softly and John Rodgers hears his own voice reverberating through the Cathedral as if through his own bones.

"My brethren and countrymen."

He knows instantly where he is. He can hear the wind and the stomping feet of the cold soldiers and the snorts of ponies and the barking of the dogs and bugles and the drums in the background as the English marched up and down the streets of Manhattan.

It is May 1776. A long line of tired volunteers trudge through the city to join the rebel cause in Virginia and Massachusetts.

Justice Thomas Jones would describe the rebels as farmers with muskets, hoes, ragged coats and torn shoes. Poor white trash. The outcasts of society. With sacks tied to sticks and clothing tied around their waists. Blacks. Old men. Young boys. The few who had horses rode nags or ponies.

They were John Rodgers's boys.

Off to fight for a country that does not yet exist.

A cause for which there is little hope -- Lost before war was even declared.

Every day, two thousand soldiers arrived on Staten Island from England and Germany. By mid-summer there would be 30,000 of the king's men in Manhattan.

From the medallion in the box, John Rodgers hears himself:

Burfie. Hello. Say *Burfie* before you say hello.

You are not hirelings like the Hessians.
You do not choose to fight.
You are sons of your country – called by her voice to her defense.

Be not afraid, therefore, of your enemies: the Lord your God will go with you.

Let no thought of flight or cowardice enter your minds.

Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made you free.

For you are engaged in the cause of God and of mankind.

It is a righteous cause.

But do not deceive yourselves:
Be prepared also for eternity.

You have an opportunity few men are given:
To give everything you have for one worthwhile cause.
To give your life so that others can be free.

Life is precious. But limited like coins. You can let it trickle away. Or throw all your coins in the mug of LIFE – liberty, independence, freedom and equality.

There is no better way to honor God's gift of life than to risk all that you have to protect other people. Your precious coins will multiply for generations, enriching the lives of thousands.

That is a useful life.

And this is a noble cause.

Be faithful and you shall receive a crown of life.
Remember your prayers, your Sabbaths, your ministers, your ordinances, your God.

But turn not only to God, but remember your fathers, your wives, your children, your brethren, and all that is near and dear to you.

You are engaged in the defense of all of that and more.
For them, for the future, and for your country.

My sons,

> the eyes of your country are watching you,
> the prayers of your country are for you,
> and the hopes of your country are placed upon your shoulders.

Let none of these hopes be disappointed.

Now, let us be up and doing! Our work is great, our time is short, and our reward is glorious!

And may Almighty God crown your endeavors with success, preserve you from danger, and return you victorious to your friends and your country.

Amen.

As the vibration ends, the candles on the altar flare. The crucified Jesus lights up and John Rodgers almost laughs.

Thanks. But was that "yes" or was that a "no"?

Of course, God never answers.

Just expects him to figure it out.

John Rodgers looks down upon the grotesque jewel.

Faith is a decision. Not a feeling. Not even a belief.

A choice. A choice to trust. A choice to act. A choice to ignore fear and face a challenge that is uncertain.

Faith is that little needle that changes the balance. The little kick of courage when the fear

is overwhelming. The magnet that makes it move.

Trust the senses. Trust the body. Trust the bells ringing in warning. Trust the candles flaring.

And, then, have faith.

Jump. Or not.

He will succumb. He knows it.

He already has.

Martha Washington knows it, too.

And she knows he knows she knows.

Martha Washington says, "You have received your calling. How say you?"

"I am praying on it," he says.

They smile at one another.

This thing… *Burfie*, she called it.

It has the look of Satan but it used his own words. Words he knew were God's inspiration.

Absent understanding, there is only faith.

Still, his fingers tremble as he lifts the abomination and pulls the cord around his neck.

No weight at all.

How could it feel so heavy on his shoulders?

How could anything squeeze his chest without being forged in iron?

His hands barely fall from the icon before it tweets: *Burfie says hello!*

He jumps back -- closer to horror than he ever imagined.

He looks at Martha Washington who is watching him with a kindly sympathetic face.

"No one said it would be easy," she says.

Say Burfie before you say hello.

From his very chest.

John Rodgers suppresses the desire to run from that which is around his neck.
But he straightens.
He has accepted this burden. It is now his.

He turns and bows to Martha Washington. "I shudder to display this. Though I trust God implicitly, I trust people with reservation. Had it been anyone but you who asked this of me, the answer most certainly would have been negative."

"You must go," she says.

"I do not doubt your good will," he says, watching her carefully. "I do not doubt that you are worthy of my trust."

"Nor should you doubt that, John," she says, reaching to pat his hand. "But, now, you need to go. The church bells are ringing and you are to speak."

He is to speak? He stares at her for a second.

And then begins to laugh.

Still laughing, and shaking his head, he passes through the doors to the sanctuary.

Isn't God amazing?

The jokes never end.

But where are the bridges?

It would kind of God to show him a few bridges…

The pews are full of people. The organ is playing.

A boy runs to John Rodgers and says "Reverend… Doctor… Sir, you are supposed to be up there!"

"This is not my church," John Rodgers says.

"Isn't it the same God?" the boy asks and disappears.

A man is already standing at the pulpit, John Rodgers sees with relief.

To the side of the altar, in red velvet gilded chairs with crowns on top, are two men. One looks vaguely familiar. Yellowish hair, a red face, an angry scowl, drooping jowls, a bulging belly, and an over--sized red tie.

The other is Charles Inglis.

Charles Inglis. How utterly appropriate.

Looking as young as the day they arrived in Manhattan in 1765. A lifetime ago.

The Right Reverend Doctor Charles Inglis was no less passionate nor brave than Rodgers.

Though John Rodgers' vanity would have to acknowledge that he -- John Rodgers -- had taken considerable risks during the War in bringing information across lines. He had been chased through the woods one day with the parish records and rebel money.

But the Right Reverend Doctor Charles Inglis risked his life when he wrote a response to Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*.

The Sons of Liberty made it quite clear that any printer duplicating the Right Reverend Doctor Charles Inglis' pamphlet would lose their printing press..

Two examples were required. The presses were broken apart and the manuscript destroyed. The printers left town.

After that, the Anglican response stayed within its own walls.

The king had control of the government.

But the mobs controlled the street.

John Rodgers was exiled from Manhattan throughout the war. Charles Inglis remained in Manhattan.

After the war, their positions were reversed.

John Rodgers returned to Manhattan and Inglis was exiled to Nova Scotia – where he became the first Bishop in North America.

John Rodgers shakes his head and smiles.

What a life they shared.

John Rodgers hurries forward and Charles Inglis stands up. They embrace like brothers.

"It is indeed a great pleasure to see you, Sir," says John Rodgers – surprising even himself with the genuine surge of affection. How could you not

always be bonded to man with whom you shared so many battles?

"And you, as well," says the old young man with tears in his eyes.

Then the organ begins to play Yankee Doodle and Johnny Carson steps up in front of the altar – between the crucifix and the nave.

He acknowledges the applause and then turns to the attention to the two men.

He says:

Burfie. Hello.

Isn't that wonderful?
No, I'm serious.
These two men -- The Reverend Doctor John Rodgers and His Excellency, the Right Reverend Dr. Charles Inglis -- reunited after a couple of centuries apart!

Opposites in a war where everything was at stake -- their families, their religion, their jobs, and their homes.

Yet, here they are tonight, warmly greeting one another…
Of course, it has been a few centuries… So maybe it did take a few centuries to soften the animosities….

No, I'm just kidding.

Fine men. They know I'm joking. They've just shown us what true gentlemen are -- haven't they?

Let's give our hand in sincere applause to the Right Reverend Doctor Charles Inglis and Reverend Doctor John Rodgers.

Okay, that's enough applause. This isn't a contest.
If I don't do the monologue, I don't get paid…

Here we are at the Cathedral. Isn't it amazing? No, truly.

Look at this, I've got Jesus at my back. How could anything go wrong?

Welcome to the Cathedral.

A Cathedral!
I must say: This is a first for me.
They never even let me talk in church.

I love this setting. No. Really. I'm being serious. It's the perfect cover. You can all now say you spent the day at church…

Find the hidden priest and you'll get your indulgence.

And here we are at Trinity Cathedral…

Trinity. Isn't that perfect? You can never go wrong with three.
All good things come in threes: Scotch, Pall Malls, and a fine lady. For Episcopalians: incense, pomp, and impeccable hats. Presbyterians: guilt, casseroles, and chaos. Americans – cheese made out of milk and called Kraft. Abel, Cain and Seth.

Three. Perfect. Unless you're Ed McMahon with a chimpanzee.

Double. Double the fun!

No, seriously, folks, it's an honor to be here in Trinity Cathedral.
They tell me it burned down in 1776.
I know the feeling. I bombed in Cleveland once.
But don't worry. We'll get through it.

After all, this is the reunion of the Sons of Liberty.
And if there's one thing they know how to do: It's to declare something finished before it has even begun.

Although it's looking pretty finished now, isn't it? With the Headless Horseman horse we invited inside our walls... Should've looked under the tail…
One theory about that, you know: It was virus. Planted a long time ago.

You are a good crowd tonight.
Not like last night.
Did you see last night's show?
I haven't seen that many angry men in wigs since King George tried to tax their chamber pots. Looked like monkeys scaling those walls.

I do have some advice for the Sons of Liberty.

Let's talk about the wigs… Don't give those up. A man is just not a man unless the curl is just right.
And it hides the baldness.
And the lice…

And, about that tea… Could you add lemon and sugar?

Third, I know the food situation is really bad out there. I saw the luncheonette is offering hero sandwiches for rent. Hamburger helper can't find anything to help… And, in Beverly Hills, coffee is two dollars a cup.

Even the beggars have raised their prices.

So: Help the economy: put a little cheese on your wafer.

Tonight's sacrament is brought to you by Kraft American Cheese — the official liturgy of liberty. Surely that little bite of the savior would be better with cheese.
Let it melt on your tongue.
Nothing melts like our unique American cheese.
And don't worry: All slices are individually packaged -- just like our freedoms.
Available in different flavors to suit everyone's unique taste.

And, now, let me introduce our Key Note speaker…

Now Johnny Carson is fumbling.

An extemporaneous monologue is one thing -- he's in control of the content.

But an introduction?

All he knows are the names…

But he's a professional.

And speaking of fun guys….

Today we have the funnest…. Is that a word? Funnest? Funniest?

… Our keynote speaker today is Reverend John Knox, from Scotland.

Who will then be followed with commentary by Right Reverend Doctor Charles Inglis and Reverend Doctor John Rodgers.

John Knox. That's all he knows.

Carson would do knock-knock jokes but there's something about the man… Not the type to laugh at himself.

Perhaps he introduce the man with the famous line: "And, with no further ado…"

Automatically, Carson gropes into his pocket where the cue card is supposed to be.

And there it is.

He must have received it earlier. Some things become so automatic, you forget that you did them.

Glancing, so no one can see, Carson reads automatically:

Burfie. Hello.

Before he comes out, let me tell you a little bit about our key note speaker tonight.

John Knox is a 16th century Scottish reformer, credited with beginning the Presbyterian Church in Scotland.

A man who despised authority. Unless it was his own.
A man who despised women. Unless they fawned on him.
A man who was never caught with fire – but poked the embers to create the flames.

He and his Lords of Congregation maintained brutal control of Mary, Queen of Scots; orchestrated or encouraged the death of her young singer, Davie Rizzio; tormented and murdered the earnest twenty-year-old King of Scotland, Henry Darnley.

He set his fiery pulpit to the task of burning Catholic and Anglican chapels, churches, and monasteries throughout Scotland. Destroying and plundering crucifixes, baptismal fonts, chalices… Melting for gold.

That would be enough.

But, there's more…

John Knox was the body guard of George Wishart -- executed during the reign of Bloody Mary. According to Knox: when George saw there was no hope for himself, he begged John Knox to run. So: George was burned on the stake while his bodyguard, John Knox, was hiding in a castle.

He also claimed to be the counselor for Sir Wyatt. Wyatt, too, had said that John Knox was more important as a preacher than a revolutionary. When Wyatt was beheaded,

his body placed in quarters at every gate in London, John Knox was in Scotland.

He was the man who inflamed anger and hatred…
But never got his hands dirty.

John Knox is the author of that cheery little pamphlet: *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women.*

Quickly summarized: Suffer not ye men to obey a woman. Women and Catholics are the devil's tools.

Under his guidance, the Lords of the Congregation swore to provide mutual support against "Satan and all wicked power that does intend tyranny and trouble against the congregation."
As required by the scripture, the Lords excluded: "He who is emasculated."

For they knew they were holy…
and the Lord was among them
because John Knox said so.

And here he is, himself, to edify us today…

Ladies and gentlemen…

please welcome —
straight from 16th--century Edinburgh,
the man who has claimed his favorite adjectives are bloody, beastly, rotten, and stinking:

Give a big welcome to John Knox!

What the hell? thinks Carson as he returns to the shadows. Who writes these scripts?

But, really, he is wondering: Why did he say such words?

He'd hardly heard them as he said them. How did such things come through his mouth without the filter of his own brain?

Darkness falls and candles flare. The flushed face of John Knox appears behind the fiery crucifix. His neck juts forward with round red jowls, a perpetual squint; sculpted hair of Medusa, and a hand continuously out.

He leans on the pulpit and looks down on the people.

He says:

There are the worthy.
And unworthy.

Thus: if thy brother or thy son or thy daughter or thy wife or thy friend, entice thee to serve other gods, you shall not consent unto him.

Thou shalt, instead,
kill
thy brother or thy son or thy daughter or thy wife or thy friend.

Thine hand should be the first upon him to put him to death.

Delay not thy vengeance!
Let death devour them in haste.
Let the earth swallow them up.
Let them go down quickly into hell.

There is no hope for them.

Consume them in thine anger.
Let them never bring their wicked counsels to effect.

To the carnal man this may seem to be pronounced in rage rather than wisdom.

However, God wills that:

> all people stoop,
> cover their faces,
> and desist from reasoning,

when commandment is given to execute his judgement.

There are the worthy. And unworthy.
The worthy follow the prophet.

The prophet moves society towards greater holiness.

A prophet is to be a gadfly to the civil authority.

The civil authority worships flags. This is idolatry!

If thou civil authority fail to do as God commands:
thou shalt do it for God and the prophet.

Thou shalt do as God commands even if thy civil authority forbids it.

> It is the duty
> of the populace,
> civil magistrates, nobility, and the royal majesty
> to stamp out idolaters
> wherever they might be found.

I dare not deny that God hath revealed unto me secrets unknown to the world.

I am the prophet. I speak to motivate you.

No one has more authority than the prophet

> because the prophet's authority
> comes directly from God.

Thou shalt obey the commandments
from thy prophet
just as thou would obey
an instruction from God himself.

There are the worthy. And unworthy.

The worthy follow the prophet.

As to the unworthy:

If ye strike not at the root,
the branches that appear to be broken
will bud again.

Stone dead hath no fellow.

John Knox, first Presbyterian, disappears.

The Applause Lamp blinks but no one claps.

Johnny Carson stays in the shadows.

The darkness is silent.

The silence holds.

Where's Johnny?
No one can find him.
As if he has disappeared.

Does the man exist without the red light?

Johnny Carson knows the silence that should not be disturbed.

But Jane Fonda does not.

The Cathedral is gone.

The Theatre is back.

Suspended midair in a velvet armchair, Jane Fonda hovers above stage left. Below her are two lime green foam chairs with a round Formica coffee table between them.

Smoke curling into the rafters from her joint, she purrs: "*Burfie, hello*… ."

Doc Severinsen raises his trumpet for the reveille.

Jane says with a nod to Doc Severinsen. "You're very good at that."

"Thank you," he says. "Occasionally, people tell me that."

From stage left, out comes the Right Reverend Doctor Charles Inglis led by William Duer, walking backwards with his camera on the reverend, talking as he goes:

"*Burfie. Hello*," William Duer says quietly. Then, in a loud rolling voice accompanied by a drum roll, he says:

Ladies and gentlemen:
Give a big hand to the Right Reverend Doctor Charles Inglis – Bishop of Nova Scotia and erstwhile pastor in the great Trinity Church of Manhattan.

"Toot," says Doc Severinsen.

Look at that wig – curled and powdered to perfection. Tonight the Right Reverend Doctor Charles Inglis is wearing a scarlet cassock made of watered silk, held with 39

individual sculpted buttons symbolizing the 39 Articles of Religion.
Text 39AAR for prices.
Each one humanely manufactured and blessed by the Bishop.
Over the cassock, the Right Reverend Doctor Charles Inglis wears a surplice of white satin; over the surplice, a fur stole; over the stole, a holy chasuble. Layers upon layers of spiritual protection. And as colorful as the rainbow.

"Toot," says Doc Severinsen.

Don this robe and you will be amazed:
People will believe everything you say.
You can tell them they will have a happy afterlife
And they will believe you
Because of this robe.
Without changing your diet or exercising.
You, too, can become more spiritually powerful…
Right now! Don't delay: Text FFIncrease.

The Right Reverend Doctor Charles Inglis seats himself on the lime green foam chair and bows his head in prayer.

"And don't forget! Go to RRDCI.com… Right now!" shouts William Duer as he disappears.

Doc Severinsen plays the drill call on his golden trumpet.

"Good job with the bugle," says the announcer. "You're pretty good at that."

"So I've been told," says Doc Severinsen.

"And now we have Dr. Rodgers…"

With that, John Rodgers steps forward: Bible in hand, heel-first stride, head forward.

William Duer's bored voice is heard off stage:

Here comes Reverend John Rodgers. Two honorary doctorates but no real education.
He dons a limp black academic robe adorned by a plain white cravat.

> (This outfit is also available at RRDCI.com. Only five clicks to the wholesale warehouse.)
> But -- don't be a john…

John Rodgers sits down in the second chair, a small round table between and the Right Reverend Doctor Charles Inglis. Once seated, he, too, bows his head.

William Duer jumps out on front of them and says to the audience:

Whether you visit us at RRDCI.com or not – don't forget to vote: Which is the most worthy?

If it is Right Reverend Doctor Charles Inglis, press any number between 1 and 9. Your vote will be instantly recorded.

"Call to worship!" toots Doc Severinsen.

For Rodgers, push 11.

"Is that two ones?" asks the announcer.

"Tattoo," says Doc Severinsen.

Then William Duer disappears.

The men are left on stage.

Two silent men sit upon lime green foam chairs with Formica table between them.

Their heads are bowed.

From the darkness: "Gentleman," purrs Jane Fonda. "Go!"

A disembodied soft voice announces as if cards were being drawn: "Based on a bet between God and Satan, we will begin tonight with the Right Reverend Doctor Charles Inglis."

A narrow spotlight turns on the Right Reverend Doctor Charles Inglis.

He clasps the crucifix hanging on his chest and looks up at Jane Fonda.

Madam, if it pleases you —

I will not say who is worthy and who unworthy.
For if I were to consider my brother Rodgers unworthy, I must first indict myself.

He and I are very different. On a ruler of 12 inches, you would find us but 3 inches of agreement.

And yet we would both know that our goals are the same: the betterment of mankind through God. The aversion to the cruelty of men.

We differ in pamphlet and in pulpit, aye! We have crossed crosses with much heat and passion.

Neither yielded but both of us suffered success and defeat.

We shared our sorrows and losses in tandem to one another – our fates tied like a teeter--totter. When one succeeded, the other – by physics itself –failed.

Once the war had begun, only one of us could inhabit Manhattan.

And it was he.

I concede. I am exiled forever from the land I love.

Yet, could I say that he was unworthy? Nay.
Do I blame the Reverend Doctor John Rodgers for the failure of my cause? Nay.

> But for the French and King George's weak leadership and the exhaustion of the English: It could just as easily have been me to conquer Manhattan.

As it should have been.

Yet, can I complain?
Did I really lose?
But for this failure of my hopes in New York, I would never have become the Bishop of Nova Scotia -- a country I now love as deeply as I love Manhattan.
And Nova Scotia needs me a great deal more than Manhattan…
Because Manhattan still has the honorable Reverend Doctor John Rodgers to shepherd its people. And Nova Scotia only has me.

John Rodgers sits, his head down, shaking it slowly back and forth. Finally, he looks up, his face wet with tears and his wide smile glistening:

I must first confess…. Had I spoken those words first, I would be much a happier man right now.
Once again, I have been outshone. In speech. In honor. In piety. And humility.

We shared so much sorrow in strife I should not be surprised that we share this mutual love for one another in peace.

I, too, was thinking that I would vote you the worthier.

For I am but the graduate of a log cabin and you are the scepter of velvet and gold and power.

Besides: I am keenly aware of my own failings and only partially aware of yours.

> (Although, I must remind you, my brother: Those faults of yours of which I know are quite formidable and may present a considerable challenge to my conclusion that thou are the worthier.)

Charles Inglis replies:

Ah, but there you betray yourself, my dear Reverend Doctor Rodgers.

For, to confess yourself the lesser: is the surest mark of being the better.

And how can you not be the more worthy? Not one – but two! Two doctorate degrees. Conferred for honor -- not merit.
And here, I only have one doctorate degree.
Which I earned.

A self-made man from a Log Cabin fluent in Greek and Roman and Hebrew…
If only you had been less interested in foreign ideas and more loyal to the English which you spoke. If only your oath to the king had mattered…

Alas, dear Reverend Doctor Doctor Rodgers, I must defer to your worthier-ness.

To which Rodgers replied:

Sir, I am bowed in awe that you should be so humble – you who bowed to only the king and all of his magistrates and anyone else with power and money in Manhattan…

Inglis says:

But, alas, dear sir: Not as humble as the man whose holy staff, like Pied Piper, directed the rats through my city. Surely that makes you more worthy than me…

Rodgers:

Oh, no, no, dear sir. While I am the master of rats, you are hobnobbing with fat cats.

Inglis:

Says the man who stole the country from the king.

Passion, fortunately, grows old with time.

The men smiled.

They stood. And hugged while both cried.

"Good to cross crosses with you again," says John Rodgers.

"Even better to do it with you," says Charles Inglis.

"The honor was mine," says John Rodgers.

"And even more mine," says Charles Inglis.

The Reverends showed little signs of wrapping up their show. Johnny Carson senses that humility, like Zeno's paradox, could be infinitely examined.

No matter how much you have, you can always find more…

And Johnny Carson's bladder is stretching…

Fortunately, the red light goes off, the doors swing open.

His *Burfie* blinks yellow.

Break

First out, Johnny Carson slips out of the auditorium into the Concourse and is suddenly surrounded by little children. Everywhere. Filling the concourse. The small type who trip adults and then scream like you kicked them.

Carson tries to stop, but it is like a river of the little tykes.

Not the river he was hoping to see.

Unable to fight the current, he joins the flow.

Carson is swept along to the John Street Theatre like an Easter Island statue carried to its resting place.

Martha Washington is waving the children in. "Rescue me!" he wants to say. But he says nothing and she just gives him a small smile and waves him along.

With the children, he disappears through a bright red giant frame into a 60-foot tunnel of candlelight. The busy street fades away behind him. The Theatre. Where rules disappear and fantasy rules.

In 1774, the Continental Congress -- the rebels -- forbade theatre.

All theatres in the rebelling colonies were ordered closed.

The freedom fighters didn't like what people were saying on stage.

Liberty was more important than freedom.

The oppressive thumb of liberty.

Who in the herd is heard?

The rebelling colonies had no theatre.

But theatre was continued in Manhattan which was controlled by the British.

Throughout the war, the John Street Theatre was famous for its satires against the Yankees, such as *The Boston Blockade* -- a farce penned by General John Burgoyne that caricatured George

Washington as “an uncouth figure… wearing a large wig and a rusty sword.”

As they enter the theatre, the children flow around Johnny Carson. Semi-circles spreading out as far as Johnny Carson can see. Like waves in raindrops. He sits stiffly in front of them -- though he cannot tell if he is on trial or an honored guest.

Behind the children, on a silver screen, is George Washington. Black-and-white, the film flickers and stops, rolls and flashes, but it is George Washington sitting at a table with a quill scratching into lambskin while his slave, William Lee, wipes his brow with a dirty rag and flies and mosquitoes torment them both.

The children sit.

Johnny Carson stays standing. He thinks. His body keeps telling him that he is sitting on a Pope’s chair, his weight distributed on the shoulders of millions. He wants to get down, but any movement he makes increases their burden.

He feels a grief so deep in his body, it never reaches his eyes. It trembles with sad rage, like a mother over the senseless death of another son.

Then, softly, Doc Severinsen’s orchestra begins to play.

The children stand and sing:

O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!

America! America!

God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!

O beautiful for hearts that meet,
With mercy, grace, and cheer,
A common path where strangers join,
And walk as neighbors dear.

America! America!

God mend thine every flaw,
Confirm thy soul in brotherhood,
and liberty in thy law!
O beautiful for those who give,
Not seeking wealth or fame,
Whose daily deeds of gentleness
Uplift our common name.

America! America!

May grace refine thy gold,
Till every gain is nobleness,
And love is wealth untold.

O beautiful for futures bright,
Where every child may see,
A land of justice, love, and hope,
…A home of liberty.

America! America!

God gave so much to thee…
A land of justice, love, and hope,

…A home for liberty.

The theatre is silent. No one even coughs.

The children remain standing, each holding a single candle.

Behind them, the picture still rolling and dissolving, George Washington and William Lee are still in their tent, a candle glowing, bitten by mosquitoes and tormented by flies.

Then a voice says:

The beauty of genuine brotherhood and peace is more precious than diamonds or silver or gold.

Hate cannot drive out hate.
Only love can do that.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness,
Only light can do that.

We now stand in tumultuous times when the values of our country are forgotten and collapsed into one--line insults and fences erected for every adjective.

I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word in reality.

Goodness, though temporarily defeated, is stronger than any evil triumphant.

The ultimate measure of your humanity is not what you say you believe.
The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience,
but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

Now is a time of controversy.

Peace defined by substance, not silence. By justice for all.
Injustice anywhere is a threat to peace everywhere.

This will be a long struggle. We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.

I urge you:

Power without love is reckless and abusive,
and that love without power is sentimental and anemic.

Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for equal rights. You will make a better person of yourself, a greater nation of your country, and a finer world to live in.

Righteous power and compassionate strength must go hand in hand.

And, while you're at it: Give humanity a warm embrace for me.

The screen behind them becomes bright and full of reds and blues and oranges and the *Burfie*s say in unison: "I'm the Headless Horseman. And I approve this massage."

Break

Johnny Carson's *Burfie* opens the door and, again, he is first one out, nearly colliding with the Reverend Doctor John Rodgers – legendary for his prolonged greetings -- well-known for his ability to spend ten minutes on cold Manhattan sidewalks inquiring about every member of the household, the family cow, and the broken fence of a year before…

Impossible to avoid, Johnny Carson skids to a stop. At least he doesn't know anyone in Carson's family…

Instead, the good Reverend was apparently a fan of show -- and can recount, in detail, multiple episodes.

Taking a breath for escape, Johnny Carson releases it when the Reverend finally says: "You appear impatient, my son."

"A bit. Urgent need. Looking for the right door."

"God has an interesting way with doors," says John Rodgers.

Doors and bridges…

There's a lesson behind every door and an adventure beyond every bridge.

But you get a limited choice.
And rarely the one you seek.

If you do get the one want, be wary:
You will be a different person when you arrive.

"Yes, I seem to be getting that message," says Carson, squirming.

The old man pats his hand and smiles. "God's building the door you need. Just keep moving…or not. Sometimes you just have to wait."

Waiting was getting more and more painful.

Trying not too look too impatient, Johnny Carson hurries away.

The corridor stretches ahead, lined with mirrors that reflect only his back. He walks faster, and the reflections walk away.

His *Burfie*'s yellow light is flashing desperately. But he does not find the pictogram of relief.

Sleepy Hollow

A sign flickers overhead: “Sleepy Hollow.”

Carson tries to bypass the door, but, in the next step, finds himself on a beach where the sand is made of shredded ballots and the waves hum like dial tones.

The mic is in his hand and the red light is on.

A single spotlight lands on a sleeping figure in a beach chair, surrounded by cobwebbed hair and the scent of mothballs and memory.

Carson says softly – as if rehearsed: “I’m speaking very quietly because we have a very special guest tonight. He went to sleep a hundred years ago and is about to wake up.”

As if the sun were rising: a circle of light lands on an old man in a beach chair. A very old man. A hundred years of white gauzy hair surrounds him like a web or a cloud so he looks more like Winken, and Blinken and Nod on an ocean of foam. He sleeps with an old wooden bowling ball and a cracked leather knapsack.

The stage is fully lit.

The knapsack suddenly erupts -- vibrating wildly, like the bells of a cartoon alarm clock, to the tune of “Yankee Doodle:”

Yankee Doodle bought the town.
Yankee Doodle dandy—
Bought the town and raised the rent,
Ain’t the laws so handy?

The old man is startled awake, coughing out 100 years of dust. He struggles, trapped in his own hair.

From stage right, comes Johnny Carson dressed as Uncle Sam with orange hair, an oversized red tie, a sash across his chest reading CENSORED, money slipping from hidden palms, a selfie--stick projecting from his hat to ensure that he always shows his very best side, and a GoPro telling him what he sees.

"It would appear that you need help terminating your alarm," Johnny Carson says as he reaches into the jumping knapsack. The sound stops.

"Strike! …Or— spare?" the old man cries. "Was I lucky?

Johnny Carson says, "I can't spare a Lucky Strike. I don't smoke anymore."

"Which was the pitch?"

"Where am I?" asks the old man.

"You are in a rip of time," says Johnny Carson. "Or maybe just a wrinkle."

"Ah, then, hereinafter, I shall be called Rip Van Wrinkle," pronounced the old man, rising from the cloud of hair with a loincloth and a staff.

He pounding the staff upon the ground.

"And you?" he asks. "Who are you?"

"I am Ripoff van Wrangle," says Johnny Carson. "Formerly known as Uncle Sam."

"I thank you, Sir, for awakening me. I was afraid I'd be late." The old man attempts to step forward but trips on his own hair.

"When were you expected?" Carson asks.

"I was on my way to fight for liberty when I stopped for a game of ninepins in Washington D.C.. Something in the air must have caused me to become unconscious."

"Un-conscience, you mean," says Johnny Carson. "It's a D.C. malady."

"Do you have secrets in that knapsack?" Johnny Carson asks.

"Just an apple," says Rip Van Wrinkle.

Johnny Carson says in a well-measured theatrical voice: "Isn't it true that all the secrets you seek are in that knapsack beside you, Pandora."

"My knapsack?" asks Rip Van Winkle with overly great surprise. "I thought it only had an apple."

"Indeed," says Johnny Carson. "It is an Apple."

"I'm not hungry. You would think after a hundred years -- I would be hungry. But I thirst only for information…"

"An apple a day tells you what the doctor would say."

Rip Van Wrinkle reaches into the cracked leather knapsack. He brings out a vibrating object that glows.

He jerks back, eyes wide.

He drops it, pounces on it, picks it up, holds it up again, turns it sideways, upside down, presses it to his ear like a seashell. It hums and buzzes in his hands.

Then, he falls to his knees. "A Coke bottle," he breathes with reverence.

Johnny Carson says: "The Gods must be laughing."

The cell phone says:

Thank you for calling Carnac the Magnificent! Please listen carefully as our options have changed:

For justice, press one.
For integrity, press two.
For free speech, refer to fee speech and see our corporate sponsor.

With a shaky finger, Rip Van Wrinkle pushes "1."

The cell phone says:

If this is an emergency, please hang up. Don't call back.

There's a momentary beat and then:

Justice. Fundamental to our values. It is in our national pledge -- Liberty and justice for all.

Justice. Sliding the balance between fairness and unfairness.

Nothing is more important to the functioning of a good government than justice. Results may vary across jurisdictions. Not valid in red states.

Prices may vary. Results promised according to price.

(Please note: Blind to irrelevant differences. Bring money.)

Appearing pro per: When you get to the front of the line, please return to the back.

Otherwise trust the state--employed lawyer to protect your interests. And that of 1836 other clients in the same hearing. Remember: Bid once or pay forever.

One bad attorney creates a crate of rotted apples.

Choose your lawyer carefully. Just a hint: Who are his friends?

Please fill out the questionnaire at the end of this conversation. And, when doing so: Remember: you, too, may need justice some day.

Additional expenses apply.

To make a complaint, please deposit $10,000.
Otherwise hang up.

The apple goes dark.

"Well, that's inflation!" says Rip Van Wrinkle. "In my day, we just held the criminals in stocks."

"Nowadays," says Johnny Carson. "The criminals control the stocks."

"In my day, we had trials and the guilty stood before the bench," says Rip Van Wrinkle.

"Nowadays: the guilty sit on the bench," says Johnny Carson.

"In my day, the judges made the decisions and handed down the sentence," says Rip Van Wrinkle.

"Nowadays, the sentence is handed to the judge."

And the children with their flutes encircled the men:

Yankee Doodle went to court,
With a spiteful grudge;
Slipped a dollar in his hand,
And bought himself a judge.

Yankee Doodle bought the vote,
Voices all for sale;
Every dollar gets to speak —
The biggest stack prevail.

Yankee Doodle made it law,
Money talks the loudest;
Build a mountain billions high,
And buy yourself the proudest.

Yankee Doodle found his voice,
Cash became the measure;
Justice weighs the dollar bills —
The rich can sing forever.

"And the poor are muzzled?" asks Rip Van Wrinkle.

Johnny Carson sees that he is speaking but cannot hear him.

Rip Van Wrinkle shrugs his shoulders, lifts lifts the apple and presses "2."

The apple says:

You have chosen integrity: The underlying value of all values.

Integrity consists of 4 things:

1. Saying only that which you believe to be true; and

2. Not saying that which you know to be untrue; and

3. Making promises with the intent to fulfill them; and

4. Fulfilling the promises that are made.

Important safety information follows:

Ask your lawyer if integrity is right for you.

Side effects – especially in the Big Beautiful Government will include unemployment.

Integrity can be fatal to your career, lead to false imprisonment, harassment, abuse, investigatory retaliation, tar and feathering, doxxing, and a special investigation by the Big Beautiful Government's IRS, ICE, DOGE, FBI, CIA, DEA, ATF, ICE, DHS, NSA, CBP, NCIS, USSS, IRS, SEC, FDIC, CFTC, CFPB, GAO, OMB, DOJ, EOUSA, AUSA, OIG, FISA, CDC, NIH, FDA, EPA, AHRQ, DOT, FAA, GSA, USPS, DOE, NEA, NEH, ED, IMLS…

Remember: the Headless Horseman never forgets.

To have integrity today is like being a monk.

After all: Riches are just a bed and bar tab away.
O'Liargram….

Stage lights flicker.

Rip Van Wrinkle is surrounded by beautiful O'Liargram girls wearing long white fuzzy ears on their heads and not much else. They serve him glowing green liquid, oil his hair, and massage his swollen feet.

They constantly coo and tell him what a good boy he is.

Then they dance around him:

Yankee Doodle tells a lie,
Knows it isn't right;
Says it loud and says it proud,
And tweets it every night.

Yankee Doodle makes a speech,
Words he doesn't mean;
Changes tune by polling day,
And calls the lie "routine."

Yankee Doodle makes a vow,
Knows it won't be done;
Writes it down because they asked.

The bigwigs call it fun.

Yankee Doodle swears an oath,
Hand upon the page;
Morning comes, the script is done:
He cashes in the stage.

Yankee Doodle wags his tail,
Echoes through the right.
Echoes come included --
A bar tab and a night.

"That's the way it is," says Johnny Carson with a grimace. "Everyone must come to the king's castle and pay homage to the king."

"Abraham Lincoln sold nights in the White house," says Rip Van Wrinkle helpfully.

"We sell rooms to the White House," says Johnny Carson. "And anyone else with enough cash to buy indulgences from our country."

"At least you have free speech," says Rip Van Wrinkle.

Rip Van Wrinkle pushes "3": "Free speech."

"I'm sorry, Sir. No collect calls."

"Please deposit five cents for three minutes."

"Deposit another nickel, please."

"Please deposit ten cents for the next three minutes."

"Please deposit twenty--five cents to continue your call."

Your time is up. Please deposit additional coins."

Overhead, Johnny Carson hears: "There he is!"

Johnny Carson's *Burfie* begins flashing red.

Carson is pulled by the *Burfie*. He is splayed against the wall, avoiding smashing his nose only by throwing back his head. The *Burfie* is attached like a magnet and it is attached to his neck.

Carspm cannot move. The *Burfie* has him in a choke hold.

From the ceilings, the doors, and the walls come Darth Vader with guns in both hands and rifles under the arms, tanks in front and helicopters on top.

If there are people inside, they are hiding behind masks.

No individual responsibility.

Just following orders.

They seize the old man and drag him across the floor and out the door.

Carson hears their *Burfies*:

Hunt them down! Find them!

Bring them to GEO and CXW for your reward!

> *Freeloaders of the American Dream, stealing jobs and welfare simultaneously*

Bring them to GEO and CXW for your reward!

> *Murderers of "traditional values," armed with bilingual children and spicy food*

Bring them to GEO and CXW for your reward!

> *Rapists of cultural purity, smuggling rhythm, resilience, and multilingual poetry*

Bring them to GEO and CXW for your reward!

Invaders with leaf blowers and tamales,
threatening gated communities with flavor

Bring them to GEO and CXW for your reward

Disease carriers of empathy, compassion, and
inconvenient historical memory

Bring them to GEO and CXW for your reward

Voters-in-disguise, secretly plotting to
overthrow democracy with civic engagement

Bring them to GEO and CXW for your reward

Anchor baby manufacturers, accused of
weaponizing childbirth

Bring them to GEO and CXW for your reward

Queue jumpers in the sacred line of whiteness,
skipping centuries of sanctioned oppression

Bring them to GEO and CXW for your reward

Identity thieves, impersonating humanity in a
system built to erase them

Rip Van Wrinkle has no valid birth certificate.

We can't let anyone hear these people!

Carson thinks: Well, at least they recognize that he's a person..

The stage goes dark and silent.

Only a knapsack and an apple remains.

Break

Johnny Carson's *Burfie* pulls him through door and into the hallway.

"Welcome to the human race. Exit is that way," Carson mutters as he gets his balance and straightens his tie and sets off to find the bathroom.

It was not to be.

His *Burfie* stops him – pulling Carson to a metal pole with a blinking yellow light.

Darth Vader approaches. In his soulless voice, he says:

"I'm so glad I found you, Great Carnac. We've got the interviews set up for you in the One-Way Pavilion in one-way booths."

The *Burfie*s are synching.

Carson sees the Darth Vader *Burfie* and his own blinking in unison.

He can't stop the download, but he lied to his *Burfie*.

That's how he knows a *Burfie* contact from a real contact. Anyone who calls him the Great Carnac and thinks he was born in Nebraska was a *Burfie* contact.

"One-way interviews?" asks Johnny Carson.

"Yes. That's what is next on the agenda."

"What is a one-way interview?" he asks.

"Like jeopardy. They give you the answer and then you frame the question."

"What's the point of that?"

"Making sure that you don't get sued. Avoiding fines. Recognizing where your bread is buttered. Keeping the Headless Horseman happy."

"Then why have an interview at all?"

"We all need to get paid."

Johnny Carson shrugs his shoulders, unbuttons the button of his pants, and climbs on the transport with its twirling light.

"We all need to get paid…" Honestly, who is he to argue with that?

King of Late Night television. He'd done alright for himself.

Though his wealth would not even rate First Class in today's Big Beautiful Government…

They are raking in money all over the world.

Johnny Carson was once one of the richest men in the country.

And he cannot deny the pleasures that money bought. Lying on his yacht at night looking at a bowl of stars all around him… That, alone, was worth a lifetime of hard work…

But, one-way interviews?

That might be too much.

He had done things he regretted in his life. But he had never sold his audience to anyone else.

He had never deceived his audience.

Everything he did from the moment the red light was on, was to bring the audience closer to him and his guest.

Interviews were what Johnny Carson loved most.

He never talked to a guest before the show – even if they were the best of friends – especially if they were good friends.

That moment of initial greeting welded them altogether – himself, his guest, the audience..

After that: the interview grows the way vines inner-twine. They come their own entity -- merged and in synch.

That connection was the key to his livelihood. The basis for his success.

The reason no woman ever trusted him to be monogamous.

A one-way interview?

Might as well be fiction.

Johnny Carson is motioned onto a VIP cart to whizz past the people with their luggage, run down those who might impede the way.

The transport stops. "That's it, Sir," says Darth Vader.

Johnny Carson climbs off and turns to ask the Darth Vader where he is, what he's supposed to do, and where he's supposed to go.

But Darth Vader has fulfilled its mission.

The man is gone.

If there was ever a man inside at all…

Johnny Carson's *Burfie* is tapping and chirping and blinking, increasing in intensity.

"Concord K," it flashes. Blinking red.

"Is that where I am or where I am supposed to be?" Johnny Carson asks.

"Both," says *Burfie*.

Carson looks around but sees no signs.

Burfie starts vibrating and chirping and flashing but Carson will not be rushed. He knows what he wants.

He steps against the wall.

Before he does anything else, he will relieve his body of its pressure…

> No pictogram of a man promising relief.

People are rushing back and forth in front of him – like a freeway at its fastest – weaving between each other with suitcases, children, backpacks, and bags. Everyone has a place to go and the others are just shadows in their way.

Announcements are constant. Carson hardly hears them. "Seattle leaving now from Gate 7." "Dallas arriving at Gate 2…" Briefly he sketches the monologue in his mind – seeing the Seattle Needle skidding to a stop and the oily cattle stampeding Gate 2.

There's something about this…

This Cathedral. Or Casino. Or Airport… Or Theatre…

Something they all have in common…

It comes to him now.

You can't hold on to the past and you can't escape the present.

It is as if you only exist now and never before — except in a lingering mist your cells remember and your brain forgot. Pavlov's dogs could not explain salvation with a bell; Seligman's could not explain why they did not move when shocked; Bandura's boys could not explain why they hit the clown.

Seven generations the curse.

Someone along the line of succession must finally come to realize that the bell is just a bell; that pain is sometimes worth the cost; and that you choose who you are by who you choose to be with.

Otherwise, like Sisyphus, a lifetime is spent pushing a rock up a mountain to watch it fall again.

Generation after generation.

Change is the key.

Constant change. Constant growth.

Yet people seek contentment and wealth and objects. Like babies huddled in their cribs with all their toys around them.

Routine is the enemy of growth.

Nothing changes in a well-worn groove.

Nothing grows in ground that is too hard.

Without growth there is no life.

This Carson knows.

His *Burfie* is yellow and the pressure on his groin is becoming unbearable. Soon, he is sure, his desperate body will absorb the poison back into itself.

Looking up, he finally sees that welcome pictogram of a man with an arrow, and he sets off.

To be stopped by a security line.

More accurately. Four security lines. Labeled: Private – First Class – Extra – Coach.

King of Late Night television, after all -- one of the richest men of his generation: Carson heads for the Private line.

He sees entourage after entourage mounting the steps to their private jets. No security for them.

He passes four frowning Darth Vaders.

He touches the gate and his *Burfie* drags him by the neck to a pole with a blue blinking light saying "Blue light special! Blue light special!" and the announcer is shouting: "Trespass! Trespass! Trespass!"

Dath Vaders surround him -- ten fat muzzles within three inches of his face.

Darth Vaders emblazoned with LMT, NOC, RTX, GD, BAH, LDOS, HII, KTOS.

Plastered against the pole, Carson sees a parade of the rich of all nations walking without security to the private jet.

"Take them to O'Liargram," Carson hears. "They've got a room and a bar tab."

Carson's *Burfie* has been downloaded and reprogrammed with new instructions.

He is picked up, brushed off, and released.

Darth Vader says, "Just a misunderstanding, Sir. Safety first, you understand."

"Whose safety?" Carson asks.

"We're just following the law, Sir," Darth Vader says.

"Whose law?" Carson asks.

"I don't make the law. I just follow it," says Darth Vader .

"Who does make the law?"

"The people we need to keep safe," says Darth Vader.

"How can I become one of them?"

"It's a private club," says Darth Vader .

Money trumps all.

Carson steps away.

There are three other lines.

This time he thinks its wise to be a little more careful and watch before he chooses.

The first line to his left has no one in it at all.

A single Darth Vader guards the gate.

An old woman approaches. She looks like she might be Mexican. She shows Darth Vader some documents and they are handed back to her.

She walks away.

A young man sidles up with his headset on. Darth Vader takes his documents and returns them with a head shake.

A father approaches, carrying a toddler wrapped in a frayed blanket. Darth Vader scans their

papers, then gestures silently to the void behind them.

A woman in a fast-food uniform steps forward, grease stains on her shirt. She offers a pay stub. Vader doesn't touch it. She bows slightly, then leaves.

A teenager with a skateboard and a backpack stitched with patches—"Free Palestine," "Jesus Was a Refugee"—tries to smile. Vader doesn't flinch. The boy rolls away, slow and silent.

An elderly man with a walker and a veteran's cap arrives. He presents a discharge paper, yellowed and folded. Vader returns it without a word. The man salutes, then shuffles off.

A mother with three children in tow—one asleep, one crying, one asking questions—offers a birth certificate and a utility bill. Darth Vader glances, then shakes his head.

Over and over -- it is the same.

People approach with documents and are turned away.

Johnny Carson walks up to Darth Vader . "What do I need to get through this gate?" he asks.

"No one gets through this gate," Darth Vader says.

"Why do people keep coming up here?"

"They don't read the fine print," Darth Vader says.

Carson looks very closely at the sign. "I don't see any fine print," he says.

"It's understood," Darth Vader replies.

Carson goes to the next line.

It looks nearly infinite. Winding like a snake down the hallway, back and forth so each person is always facing another person going the opposite way.

The sign overhead says: "Cattle."

The next line looks better. It says "Bulls."

Johnny Carson doesn't feel like a bull, but he qualifies.

He approaches Darth Vader cautiously. He does not touch the gate. He keeps his hands visible.

"Is this line just for bulls?" he asks.

Darth Vader says, "Yes. Sir."

"So what must I have to be a bull?" he asks.

"Nothing trumps like money," Darth Vader says. "We don't check anything else."

"What's the advantage to being a bull?"

Darth Vader brings out a form with boxes listing hundreds of thousands of potential legal issues.

But points out only a few:

Bulls load first. Their luggage is carried and stowed for them. They are given orange juice and nice cool wipe when they sit down. Their seats recline to beds. They have enough room to cuddle or curl. They have their own lights, blankets, televisions, and fans. A servant remains in their cabin to make them comfortable – to bring them blankets, pillows, ice, compression socks, headsets and covers so the bright light won't disturb their sleep.

They are fed what the Privates eat.

But still, the steak is fat and sizzles when served. The asparagus is fried with just a tinge of lemon butter. The potatoes are fluffy and the bread melts in the mouth.

Most importantly: A curtain separates them from the rest of the herd.

Also: They get their own bathroom.

"All this," says Darth Vader , "can be yours for gold."

"How much gold?" asks Johnny Carson.

"More than you have," says Darth Vader .

And, he's right, of course.

Johnny Carson turns around and walks half a mile down the line to get behind the rest of the herd in the main line for coach. The one that stretches over two thirds of the plane and holds ninety percent of the passengers. Democracy in action. Money trumps all.

After his *Burfie* is examined for seditious speech, goods, thoughts, products, or questions, Carson is seated in the middle.

Between a woman by the window eating Cheetos while laughing on the phone while little orange crumbs are falling on his Best Dressed Pants like snow.

The man on the aisle has the temper and build of a grizzly bear with back pain. His headset is firmly on his ears and, still, he is growling.

Carson squirms with discomfort.

He can't climb over the man, he can't climb under the man, he can't go around the man.

His *Burfie*, on airplane mode, is moaning instead of flashing.

When landed, they wait. And wait. And wait.

The man unplugs himself from the seat but blocks the aisle.

When Johnny Carson finally can stand, he gets hit in the face when a woman pulls her purse from the overhead bin.

He practically trips on the man with the tiny suitcase dragging behind him.

And is stopped by the teenager getting his luggage from the front of the plane after sitting in the back.

But, finally, he is through the jet bridge.

In the Concourse, the line to the men's restroom extends to infinity.

Parade

His ears are still ringing when Johnny Carson finally sees that longed-for pictogram without a line!

He swings open the door with relief.

Only to discover that someone had apparently found it amusing to change the signs on the doors.

He is reasonably sure he hears someone say: "Caught one!" as he enters.

He is sitting on a reviewing stand. The Little League type with peeling green pain, loose and bent nails. Rope reinforcement at the corners.

Far too unsteady for a man who's holding too much water.

But the mic with its red light is on in front of him.

Trumpets blare.

*Burfie*s on sticks sway like cattails along the avenue. A banner stretches across the street: The First Annual Parade of Famous Sons of Liberty — Sponsored by O'Liargram Bedding and Pillows, a Division of Big Beautiful Government.

And there appears to be an oncoming float.

A flatbed with a man dressed in a khaki uniform and a red--headed little boy are strolling hand in hand on a treadmill through trees down a well--worn path. The boy is whistling and the father is singing:

Well, now, take down your fishin' pole
and meet me at The Fishin' Hole,

We may not get a bite all day,
but don't you rush away.

What a great place to rest your bones and
mighty fine for skippin' stones,

You'll feel fresh as a lemonade,
a--settin' in the shade.

Whether it's hot, whether it's cool,
oh what a spot
for whistlin' like a fool!

Hangin' around, takin' our ease,
watchin' that hound a--scratchin' at his
fleas.
Come on, take down your fishin' pole
and meet me at The Fishin' Hole,
I can't think of a better way
to pass the time o' day.

As they reach the fishing hole, Andy Griffith bends down to ruffle Opie's hair, and the boy looks up to his father with adoration.

Words flash across the screen.

The Andy Griffith Show —
Sundays at 8 a.m..
Authority you can trust

And Andy Griffith says: "I can't think of a better way to pass the time o' day."

Does he have any idea what 10 seconds costs? thinks Johnny Carson. No one has time for

anything like this. Only in a sleepy old town like Sleepy Hollow.

Now they would flash subliminally: "Authority you can trust."

That will get everyone's attention.

And it would have to be a comedy.

He doesn't look anything like Darth Vader.

"I hope he got a fishing permit," Johnny Carson says into the mic.

The next float rattles into view. A boy on a stage at the Elks club doing magic and saying with earnestness and belief he would soon lose:

"Every illusion begins with a goal. Every truth begins with a question."

Johnny Carson himself! Age about 9 or 10.

He had said that. And he thought he understood it.

But now he thinks illusions end with goals and truths end with answers and that is not progress.

Johnny Carson notes: A little fast on the entry, and slow on the exit…

But still at the head of the line!

Beside him on the rickety wooden viewing tower is Reverend Dr. John Rodgers to protect the souls of the people.

And Washington Irving to keep everyone honest.

John Rodgers says:

Every illusion begins with pride. Every truth begins with humility.

Then he adds:

But, what is wrong with illusions?
And what is wrong with pride?

When pride is the willingness to rise up for something more important than yourself, it is a virtue and not a sin.

Who would go before God without pride? Only a man whose life has been wasted in self-aggrandizement.
A man who has useless to his fellows -- regardless of his value to himself.

Washington Irving flops back like a rag doll dropped in shock.

I may have mistook the man but I do believe it is possible he said something with which I can agree….

Johnny Carson, with great relief, sees that float has passed and turns to introduce the next one.

"The head of the horseman!" shouts Washington Irving as he leaps into the air.

Someone unplugs him and he deflates immediately.

"A brain." Johnny Carson says. Did he say that out loud?

It looks like an oversized human brain. With a little bit of peach glaze. Pocked with wires and *Burfie* buttons…

Playing with the wires is a child with hair sticking from his skull and his tongue protruding from his mouth and his fingers waving from his ears.

He says: "They said I was slow because I would not accept the easy answers. But:

Every truth begins with a question. And
another question. And another.

"Albert Einstein, ladies and gentlemen," says Johnny Carson, his tongue clicking a little.

A brief flash in his mind of his neck against a wall and he feels an unexpected jolt inside him.

Nice truth he gives us.
Just keep asking another question…. Tactic of the Darth Vader and bureaucrats alike. They call strangulation by regulation….

The bitterness surprises him and he scrambles inside to think of something funny.

John Rodgers beside him leans forward.

No truth is undug without questions; no sweet fruit is tasted without the peeling of the skin; no singularity can be discovered without the study of the whole…

Johnny Carson looks at John Rodgers and shakes his head as if awakening. His eyebrows raised. His silly face. He looks at the audience.

"I knew that!" he says.

And then he turns to the camera. "What he said," he says, pointing.

John Rodgers continues: "It is in the exploration and discovery that truth is chiseled…"

He misses the pulpit, thinks Johnny Carson with mounting dread. An up-stager. Scene-stealer. Mic-hog…

Johnny Carson says in his commanding voice: "And, here is another float, Doctor Reverend Doctor…"

This is the voice every cameraman on the set knew. It meant: Put the camera on me.

A cue never missed twice.

Johnny Carson knows the screen is his without even looking.

He turns to introduce the next float but instead the parade hasn't moved.

"That said," says John Rodgers. "The minimum necessary of any restraint is always to be preferred."

Johnny Carson nods with resignation.

What is it about a collar that always trips him up? Johnny Carson's stumbling more during this amateur parade than when performing before ten million people.

He is about to say something pithy when the brain wobbles on its wheels, catches in a pothole, and looks like it is about to roll off…

Didn't they say they'd lost Einstein's brain? I think he took it with him, he thinks.

But then, the float rights itself and moves on.

Next is a giant face with giant jowls and no hair at all. Round as a snowman. Nose sharp as a carrot. Limping along. His voice oozes out slowly:

Every story begins with a promise.
And ends with a surprise.

"Prerequisite for employment by the Headless Horseman at the Big Beautiful Government," says Carson. "Never do what you promise to do… The only surprise is: if there is no surprise…"

And this float was: Alfred Hitchcock, folks."

Johnny Carson says. "You might have thought – as did I—that it was Frosty the Snowman after a shave… Nope. Turns out it is Psycho himself…"

Beside him John Rodgers is talking.

Johnny Carson doesn't know when he began talking.

There should be no agreements made with surprises anticipated.
A man has nothing if he bears not his word with pride and honor.
A promise to another man is as sacred as a promise to God and himself.
We are but flesh if we do not define ourselves by act and deed!

By now the man is standing on a chair -- wobbling like Brother Mug in a saloon.

Johnny Carson helps him down.

John Rodgers offers Carson a quarter, which Carson refuses.

John Rodgers is still talking.

On the other hand, no story should ever be told that does not end with a surprise.
Thus, you see – what is true of all stories is not what should be true of life.
Stories are the deviations from life.
The unexpected consequences.
The cars that veer off the road out of control, in control, or to test control…
Those are the stories.
But not the muscle, the heart, or the meaning of our species."

Johnny Carson stops. Shakes his head. Points his thumb at the Reverend.

"Hey," he says. "That's true…. And that's my defense! Surprise!"

"Perfect! Perfect!" shouts Irving, clapping off-beat. "The curtains are crooked — I love crooked curtains. Adds atmosphere!"

While they try to get the donkey to move the float, Johnny Carson says: "Here's what we have so far. Supposedly there is a secret embedded in this message. Not obscure if obvious once seen."

We have:

Every illusion begins with a goal. Every truth begins with a question. (Johnny Carson)
Every truth begins with a question. And another question. And another. (Einstein.)
Every story begins with a promise. And ends with a surprise. (Alfred Hitchcock)
And here comes the next float!

Standing on top of an apple tree laden with cell phones, Isaac Newton doing handstands while juggling apples. There's a flashing light and a circle going around and around.

Thinking. Thinking. Thinking.

The sign says: "Every apple has a story to tell."

"That's dangerous," says Johnny Carson. "Tell it to call a lawyer before it says anything."

"I'll stand be -- cider," says the Reverend.

Johnny looks at him. "That's all?"

"Wasn't clever enough?"

"Well, no… it was clever enough but look down there. That parade is hardly moving."

"Perhaps prayer would help."

"Will God intervene?

"I don't think God is the one who needs help."

"It's that collar!"

Johnny Carson turns and says:

Oh, look, coming over the horizon, the next float… And it is:

A hunk of marble. With a head and arms sticking out like one in stocks. Michelangelo Buonarroti's sign says:

Chisel with care.
Find the life in the stone.

"That appears to be a misprint: Chisel the life out of stone," says John Rodgers.

In blocks of marble, he found the David, La Pieta, and the Moses. How could a single man have rescued so many souls without, first, there being the life already inside to link them.

"We chisel with Darth Vader and repeating rifles," says Johnny Carson. With a vague surprise to himself. He felt a little like Lenny Bruce in those later days when his anger and hurt had overwhelmed his humor and what had been funny became bitter and sad.

This was a new sound for Johnny Carson. He wasn't sure where it came from…

But there was a tightening in his chest.

It's a parade. Words disappear. Only he will remember this moment.

The only red light is in his mind.

A black-and-white patrol car sputters down the avenue, dragging a papier-mâché fishing hole behind it. Sheriff Andy waves his hat, Opie trots beside him with a pole over his shoulder. The voice on the loudspeaker is warm, folksy, unhurried: "I can't think of a better way to pass the time o' day."

The next float shows ladies dancing with light that blinks up and around and follows Picasso's masterful strokes and men's whose hands sparkle like magic and reds that hold the richness of a stained glass window.

All muted by fog.

"Pablo Picasso," says Johnny Carson.

The sign says:

Less is more.
If it is done better.

John Rodgers nodded solemnly.

Life is like a bag of coins. You cannot know how much you have but you do not it will end.
The question is: how do you spend those precious moments? Is this moment you are spending, right now: worth the time you are investing.

"That's a long way to say: 'Less is more. If it is done better,'" Johnny Carson says.

"I waited for you. You missed your beat," Rodgers replies.

In the next float -- like a scene from Pirates of the Caribbean, Shakespeare chases a barmaid around a barrel without stopping or pausing, carrying a sign that says:

In thy bonds is thy truth.

"I don't get that," calls Johnny Carson to Shakespeare.

Without pausing or altering his speed – or getting any closer to the barmaid – Shakespeare says:

A man is as true as the ties that bind him — love, loyalty, goals, and duty. Desires trump truth."

"Nay, Sir!" says Rodgers quickly.

'Tis the opposite, in fact. Truth is free. Our integrity is our bind. We are bound to the truth but truth has the reins.

Irving flops around, pulls the microphone away from Rodgers, and says:

Truth cannot be called this or thus. One man peering from horseback sees a Headless Horseman; another sees only a shadow; and still another sees his friend tormenting a young rival. Is one more true than the other? Nay, I tell you, one must conceive of truth as a cube with many faces. And, thus, I tell you…

Carson pulls the mic back in front of himself and leans into it. "Like dice!" he says.

I just hope I don't get snake--eyes! Or is that what I want? I guess it depends upon the game… In one game, snake--eyes is a win and in the other it is a loss.

"And, thus," says Shakespeare without gasping at all, nor altering his speed, nor getting any closer to the barmaid:

Your desires bend the truth. Truth has no label nor a tint. Yet we see it through lenses of good or bad, desired or lamented….
In fact, snake-eyes are just snake-eyes.
A rose is but a rose.

Irving pulls the mic out of Carson's hand and speaks rapidly.

Truth 'tis a cube of many faces. Looking at different panels, men see different things, true to themselves. Truth is a thread of many dimensions. Not a single place or a single shape. Not stopped at all. Truth is a lens. A wide angle lens will gather a hundred truths into a single scene. A microscope will find movement in still water. Truth is a pursuit – not a destination.

Carson pulls the mic away, close to himself but Rodgers leans over and says:

Yes – like God…

Irving also leans over Carson, so the two men are practically on top of him, and says:

One man sees one side, another man a different side, yet both swear they have the whole. They quarrel not over truth itself, but over which face is showing.

"I'm afraid I have a Rubik's cube," Johnny Carson says, grabbing back the mic and pulling himself backwards. "Chaos."

Rodgers leans over and says loudly,

But truth, sir, is also a bond. A covenant. Speak it once, and thou art chained to it forever. Break it, and the chain breaks thee. Your promise must be your truth.

"Does my truth not become my promise?" asks Shakespeare, still running.

My sworn oath becomes my truth. Truth filtered by duty, love, loyalty, anger, frustration, and rage.
Do you believe men capable of distinguishing their desired truth from what they actually see?

"Just like everything is blurred in warp speed," says Carson, both hands on the mic.

"Truth is as warped as the horizon," Shakespeare says. "It bends with the sun and the moon."

Irving struggles to reach the microphone and prevails long enough to say:

Not warped — refracted! As a prism reveals the colors in light, so truth can be multi-faceted. We are not changing truth, we are only seeing different elements of it.

Carson grabs the mic back, straightens his tie, turns his shoulders away from Irving, and looks out at the audience.

I tried that once. I told my wife: 'Honey, I didn't lie — I just refracted the truth.' Didn't work very well.

Rodgers says, loud enough so he doesn't need the mic:

All of you are saying the same thing. There is more than we can imagine and perspectives we cannot adopt.
Thus, in the end – we do not have truth. But trust.
We don't have knowledge. But faith.
We don't believe. But hope.

Carson, still hugging the mic, says, "I trust my truths!"

Shakespeare says:

So, thus, I say: thy bond is thy truth. If thy bond is to love, your truth is to see beauty. If thy bond is hatred, your truth is ugly. If thy bond is truth, you will see what no else can see and no one will ever believe you.

Johnny Carson, muffled by the two men fighting over the micrcophone says:

It is a little naïve to go through life defaulting to truth. I'd be glad… well, if that were true.
If you're looking at just one side of the cube and someone else is looking from a different side, their truths are different and opposites and must collide.

Irving nearly climbs on Johnny Carson's lap to say in the mic:

And collide they must. Else there is no story.
A truth untold is a truth unseen. It must be turned. And turned again. Until it is topsy turvy.

Johnny Carson turns off the mic.

The next float floats by with a deaf man at a piano. Beethoven says:

In silence is the loudest sound.

"Don't ask. Don't tell," mutters Washington Irving.

But no one hears him.

One Way Pavillion

As he climbs down from the rickety observation tower, Johnny Carson finds himself at a row of turnstiles.

On one side everyone is going in and on the other side everyone is going out like the second hand on a clock.

The *Burfie*s are all in synch, pulsing at the same rate.

The people in the food court are swinging back and forth -- one turning to flip a hamburger while the other turns to serve it; one sticking pizza in the oven and the other passing it to the customer.

And, of course, the waterfall of coins falling from the pockets of the people into the corporate grate.

It is hypnotic and it makes Carson dizzy.

But there is only one way to go.

At the turnstile, Darth Vader holds his *Burfie* to Johnny Carson's *Burfie*. He watches the screen.

"Carson."

"I'm not your son, Son. And the cars are in the parking garage."

"Name?"

"Johnny."

"Not here. Down the corridor. Name?"

"So what would you like to know?"

Still staring at the screen, Darth Vader says:

You can pass. But remember your limitations. You're in coach. You better not whine. You better not shout. You better not cry. You better not pout.

And you know why… Your *Burfie* will find out.

And it will tell us what you don't…"

The turnstile opens.

With a glance at the parade route, Johnny Carson steps forward onto his set.

His set.

His set in Burbank. Rainbow curtains and all.

He feels his whole body relax. Except his sphincter.

But he knows how to find a restroom here! He starts to sprint when the light flashes: "Recording" and the spotlight is on him.

He doesn't even have time to see if he has buttoned his trousers again. He knows he hadn't undone the belt.

"Well, you're a great audience. I can tell," he says. Because of the silence. Absolute silence.

He does not like to act for a camera.

"Excuse me, Sir…"

There's a boy on the set. Wearing knickerbockers. He looks a little familiar. Maybe it's the sinewy way he walks. Like a rubbery chicken.

But, what a relief! A monologue to an unknown audience on an unknown day… There's no hook… Nothing to say that hasn't been said before…

The boy says, “Washington Irving, Sir.”

Oh, no! This can’t be good.

“Johnny Carson,” says Johnny Carson. “It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Irving.

The boy shrugs and looks moves his shoulders as if to nudge Johnny Carson.

“Are you the Mr. Irving from Shady Hollow?”

“Washington Irving, Sir,” Washington says again, this time very slowly and carefully as if he is trying to remind Johnny Carson of something.

“Oh, you prefer to be called Washington?” asks Johnny Carson.

“Washington Irving, Sir.”

This time the words are prolonged as if on a string and stretched. The nose is bobbing as if to encourage him and both hands are down at his waist as if pushing him.

“I don’t get it,” says Johnny Carson finally. “Do you have a script?”

He can be the straight man. The joke is on him, after all. And he’s still not sure there’s an audience out there at all.

The boy flops down on the stage -- not even in a chair. He sits with his bottom down, his hands behind him, his feet in front of him, and shakes his head, as if awakening from a long sleep.

Hey, man…. It’s like Jeopardy. I give the answer and you give the question. Then we write it up like an interview. It’s like a backwards interview, that’s all.

“I think I’ve heard of that,” says Johnny Carson.

"But that's not an interview at all. It's a script written by the interviewee and fed to the media for disbursal. In my business, we call that spam. Chopped ham. The gritty type. It's not an interview.

"Same thing."

"Uh huh." Johnny Carson shakes his head.

Washington Irving says:

Yeah, so…
Look: in an interview the questioner is trying to trick the interviewee who is trying to manipulate the questioner.
Here, we just all agree one truth one way. Why not?
No one believes anything we say anyway.

Johnny Carson says: So, when you said 'Washington Irving, Sir' that was to prompt me to ask your name?

"Finally! I thought I'd be a hundred years old before anything gets through your head!"

"What happens next?"

The boy stands up again.

"Washington Irving, Sir," he says.

"What is your name?" Johnny Carson asks.

Johnny Carson is looking at the empty audience, the red light, and this boy who appears to have no end of words…

I am as old as the fog upon the Hudson, and yet as young as the echo of a child's laughter in Tarrytown. My years, counted in calendars, are but threescore and more, yet my tales are older still — borrowed from garrulous housewives who embroidered their gossip with bats' wings and pumpkins, stitched together into legends that outlived them all…"

Finally Johnny Carson says, "How old are you?"

I was born, Sir, in a city of brick and masts, in a house that looked upon the sleepy waters of Manhattan, where the sails of the Dutch still seemed to billow even as the English banners climbed the sky. My name was given in honor of a general not yet president, though I was but a babe when his triumph was the talk of every tavern and steeple. They called me Washington Irving, and I was destined to chase shadows through old Dutch lanes and call them stories…

"Where were you born?" Johnny Carson asks and then starts shaking his head as the boy's mouth opens again…

"No! No!" Johnny Carson cries.

I didn't mean it! Wait. Wait. Let's see if you can anticipate this question…

Do you have a script?

Can we just paste the script onto the paper and call it an interview?

"Now you're getting it!" the boy says. "Pass up the bullshit and get right to the meat."

The lights turn on.

The set disappears. It was an interrogation booth, after all.

The little boy climbs back into his Darth Vader suit.

"You passed the test," Darth Vader says. "Welcome to the One Way Pavilion."

He gives Johnny Carson the mic. "Have a good show."

Johnny Carson steps through the gate and enters a Concourse with 72 tracks upstairs and downstairs but trains going just back and forth.

The illusion of movement. The exchange of energy and goods to create friction and power.

Sisyphus at high speed, he thinks. But the microphone is on and so he says:

I am told that this is the One Way Pavilion. It was an interesting journey getting here.
I hardly remember getting here, in fact…
Must be the turnstile. Throws me off.

he sign says this is the One Way Pavilion. Concourse ZA.

It sizzles with activity but is cool and air-conditioned so only the hairs on your skin feel the power.
All the activity is behind plexiglass.
Flashing lights prevent any view of the inside.

Ahead is a corridor. "Liberty and Justice for All."

"As good a place as any," Johnny Carson says to the unknown audience.

Darth Vaders are lined up on both sides. Elbow to elbow. Facing one another.

Johnny Carson can only walk through the path that they have left.

"Ah, there. I see it now. There's apparently a security check ahead," he says.

Then the Darth Vaders on one side march and sing:

Mine eyes have seen the checklist for the
One Approved Belief,
Where the curriculum is holy and dissent
is labeled grief.
We march in perfect silence, for our
questions bring us shame—
His lies are marching on….

Across from him, on the other side, the Darth Vader 's dressed in suits with red ties and wearing red hats with black robes sway and sing with Dean Martin:

Going, going, one direction!
Going, going, no correction!
Going, going, no reflection!
His lies are marching on…

And Joe McCarthy says from the grave:

Remember, boys and girls:
The one way is the only way.

And, while the Darth Vader on one side marches, the robed and throned on the other side sway:

We were overcome,
We were overcome,
We were overcome,
And, now,
we are only one:

Oh, deep in our hearts,
We know it has begun —
this crushing into one.
One way!

"I appear to be on a stage," says Carson into his mic.

And the Headless Horseman sings:

I have read the sacred memos from the
Ministry of Thought,
Where the facts are pre-selected and the
nuance overwrought.
We pledge allegiance daily to the
sanctioned point of view—
My thugs are marching on.

And his lackeys in the senate, house, and judiciary sing:

We shall speak as one,
We shall speak as one,
We shall speak as only one --
One way!
And…
With our pockets deep
Controlling what you see
You will learn to speak
Just like me --

Then they all gather together and begin to march toward Johnny Carson who runs away.

Break.

Two giant nutcrackers guard the door.

Johnny Carson's *Burfie* blinks green. He hesitates, but the pull from the chain around his neck makes him continue forward.

"Probably not the place for me," he says to the nutcrackers, hopefully.

"*Burfie, hello*," they say.

The doors open.

And without him taking a step, they close behind him.

He appears to be in legislative chambers, but the image is foggy and unclear. It changes as he moves. Walnut. Leaded glass. Fags and portraits blend into ….

an Indian village?

A boy sits on the ground, an arrow held by his toes while he shaves its edge. Behind him, a woman is scraping a thick buffalo skin and two children are chasing lizards.

But, without any obvious transition,

he is also in a cabin

where a boy is bringing in some firewood, and a man is reading by the window, and a woman is nursing a baby.

And then he is in the legislative chambers.

Two flags droop behind the Great Chair, flanked by portraits half lost in shadow.

In front of it -- far below -- there is a table with a chair. To this, *Burfie* pulls him.

He sits as *Burfie* instructs.

No one is in the Giant Chair.

Then, from the Tiki room above -- appearing in unsteady bursts like an old person a scooter -- is a shiny round fiberglass snowman with painted yellow hair, holding holding a wand.

The snowman is lowered too far and disappears behind the desk.

With jerky motions it rises again.

“Washington Irving,” says the gold nametag.

After the vibrations fade away, Washington Irving swings his wand back and forth across the room.

The chamber is suddenly filled with people.

Only people. Like looking into mirrors set to repeat into infinity until all the differences between men, women, children and babies are but pixels on a screen and there is just the one sunk into the last one which is sunk into one before.

The people are all singing:

My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing…

The voices, gathered from all the different places and all the different times and all the different languages settle from the gentle cadence of a singing wave.

Until it becomes a standing wave.

And the people disappear.

The chambers have returned.

Johnny Carson remains at the witness table facing the Great Chair.

But he has, apparently shrunk. Because Easter Island escapees appear to tower above him.

On both sides. Darth Vaders.

With Johnny Carson in the middle.

Johnny Carson considers standing up and running out between their legs.

But his *Burfie* is magnetized to the table.

The Washington Irving mannequin begins to jerk again.

Finally, it stops with the wand pointing to the Darth Vaders on one side -- who raise their rifles.

And then to the Darth Vaders on the other side -- who raise their cannons.

Johnny Carson is in between.

Time to squeak the rubber chicken! Johnny Carson looks back and forth -- shaking his head. "No. No. No. Don't shoot. Really… I haven't seen the script…"

No one hears him.

They march in unison and sing:

God save our gracious king
Long live our noble king
God save the king

Then they freeze and disappear -- existing only from instruction to instruction.

Washington Irving turns slowly as if on a turnstile and, wherever his wand is pointed, people appear.

The villagers on both sides.

Softly singing.

Gently singing.

Carrying signs of urging pro-life.

O cradle of the womb,
Save infancy from doom…
Hear our plea!
Life in God's vessel lies
Light from children's eyes
Let mercy be!

And from those emerge the women feeding the baby at dawn, again at mid-morning, again at noon, again in the afternoon, again at supper, again before sleep,

changing diapers at breakfast, changing them again before lunch, again in the afternoon, again

after supper, again before bed, and again in the night when the cry wakes her,

nursing until her breasts ache, nursing again before the ache fades,
washing clothes, folding clothes, changing clothes, hanging clothes, pulling them back on small bodies only to wash again,

bathing the baby, drying the baby, bathing the baby, drying the baby, bathing the baby, drying the baby until the hours blur together,

holding the baby when it cries, rocking the baby when it cries, walking the floor when it cries, and still it cries.

Tending the sick, encouraging the flagging, prodding the lazy, and never sleeping never sleeping never sleeping..,

Still she helps with the homework, gathers the children from school, shops, cooks, cleans, and takes her husband's clothes to the drycleaner…

And rushes off to work.

All while hoping there's enough money to pay rent next month.

Holding signs that say "My body; my choice" the women sing:

O woman strong and free,
No chain shall silence thee,
Lift up thy voice!
Life is not man's command,
Nor bound to his demand,
Your rightful choice!

And, then, again, in a choir of all women:

O cradle of the womb,
Save infancy from doom…
Hear our plea!
Life in God's vessel lies
Light from children's eyes
Let mercy be!

As these fade out, the fence appears across the chest of the Darth Vaders on both sides -- their guns facing one another.

O homeland, guard the gate,
Stay thy neighbor's blade…
Defend our land!
Land where our fathers died,
Land of the white man's pride!
From every mountainside,
I … take my stand!

Those warriors freeze and the Indian families in their teepees sing:

O strangers on our land,
Made in God's own hand,
We hear your plea!
Love strangers as your own
Bring Elijah to your home
(God sent him not alone…)
See the least of thee!

And all the blades reply:

O rifle strong and true,
Our fathers carried you,
Across our land!
The faithful must be armed,
The true and just unharmed
A gun in every hand!

The families sing:

O cradle of the womb
Save our children from the doom
Of guns.
Land where our children die
Land where our bullets fly
Land where the mother's cry:
Stop!

Then everyone appears at once, including the Darth Vaders:

My country, tis of thee
Sweet land of liberty
Make this your law!
Make us victorious
Happy and glorious
Required for all!

And Washington Irving says:

My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing…

Johnny Carson's *Burfie* beeps green.

Finally, he can get to the bathroom.

Sweet, liberty!

He runs!

Interview: Inglis and Rodgers

After a brief struggle, Johnny Carson is dropped in the dining room of O'Liargram.

He knows immediately where it is. The picture of the Headless Horseman is everywhere with pictures of young beautiful women dressed in scanty clothes borrowed from Epstein's closet.

Unfortunately, bathroom facilities are not available. They are used to store secret papers of the Big Beautiful Government.

He is sitting at a table with the Revolutionary Reverends – John Rodgers and Charles Inglis.

A cup of coffee sits on his table but he can't even look at it without his bladder squeezing a warning.

Thank you for appearing with the Revolutionary Reverends.

We, who have never given up our differences nor our friendship, explore each week new ways to overcome the pain of irrevocable damage without furthering the harm.

So, I am to be interviewed, thinks Carson. He'll discuss with his agent later how such a surprise could occur on his own set…

The restaurant facility is gaudy – so much gold, it glints. Rains money with every bar tab. Rooms buy mansions in the Hamptons.

Not a suitable place for an interview.

They have hired a camera man with one those big bulky boxes that stand on sturdy tripods and shine bright light on the face. Why don't people consult experts?

And they have a list of written questions which the Reverends begin too soon.

Johnny Carson flinches. It's the difference between an interview and interrogation. How fast the questions begin… How pointed they might be…

This was more like an interrogation.

"By now people have certainly learned how to live with peace?" John Rodgers asks.

"Yes, everyone wants a piece. The Headless Horseman slices the pie for a bed and bar tab."

"A king?" Charles Inglis asks.

"He thinks so. But money trumps all."

John Rodgers says, "There is a certain type of man who cannot bear to be without a Pope. He cannot endure the weight of responsibility for himself and his choice and he cannot see his life as his challenge to be useful for a very short time."

Johnny Carson says, "You're not talking about me?"

The Reverends laugh and say together. "No. No. We teach as we go."

Charles Inglis asks: "Surely a man cannot be held in prison without due process of law..."

"Depends on the Burfie status," says Johnny Carson.

Enough money you can be elected Congress with a dead girl in your car and grope women in dressing rooms and become President of the United States.

Without money, you're given a lawyer with 1765 other cases who is judged by the number of cases resolved instead of the outcome. Sold for good reviews. Only three or four years. Money trumps all.

"Can you go to your own church?"

"Of course. Otherwise we wouldn't know what to say."

"Do you have free speech?"

"Yes. Every dollar speaks – after the first million or so."

"If you want to get heard, how do you get heard?"

"You pay $1000 bucks an hour. And keep the money flowing to keep the speech going"

"Who controls speech?" asks Charles Inglis.

"Money trumps all," Johnny Carson says.

"Medical care for everyone?"

"Only those who can afford it."

"Surely, free education?"

Parents are bribed into keeping their children home and ignorant. Need to have employees for the chicken farms. Need people who will vote the way their preachers say.

"Libraries. Benjamin Franklin started all those libraries. What happened to them?"

Books according to the lowest common denominator. Can't have anything the thugs don't understand.
Low reading level.
Even poorer comprehension.
And dirty minds.
It is the lowest common denominator in every department.

"This is a vast country. Everyone must have a home."

"Some people have castles. Others can't even get a place to sleep."

"Fair voting?"

"Along a squiggly line to ensure that your vote doesn't matter."

"Are the slaves free?"

"People can't go anywhere because they haven't the money to leave. They work 16 hours a day and live in crowded apartments and eat pasta instead of meat. But they aren't slaves."

"Women?"

"Forced to bear the children of whoever impregnates them. Unprotected in divorce. Underpaid in employment. Unable to escape abusive relationships."

"Privacy?"

Carson fingers his new Burfie. Returned to him with its information already proofed and corrected. "As long as no one looks, we have privacy."

John Rodgers and Charles Inglis look at one another.

"What was it all about, then?" they ask together.

The waiter at O'Liargram brings gold-encrusted crumpets to their table and someone else's bar tab. "Money trumps all," the waiter says.

"Do you think the Headless Horseman will recognize himself?" someone asks.

"Claiming the profile is proof of its truth," Johnny Carson answers.

"Well, there you have it," says Charles Inglis to John Rodgers. "I told you so."

The red light on big square camera goes dark.

And the children come by singing:

O'Liargram, O'Liargram,
How I love your bed to sleep in.
O'Liargram, O'Liargram,
No truth escapes the sheets you sleep in.

Branches doled in careful measures,
Your roots are fed by market treasures.
O'Liargram, O'Liargram,
You bloom in courts, you thrive in ledgers.

O'Liargram, O'Liargram,
You hum us into sweet derision.
O'Liargram, O'Liargram,
You sing the thugs out of prison.

The pillow stuffed with shredded notes,
The blanket stitched from stolen votes.
O'Liargram, O'Liargram,
Money earned by money floats.

The chamber hums with quiet clocks,
The gavel swings, the cradle rocks.
O'Liargram, O'Liargram,
Bed and bar tab really talks.

Johnny Carson nearly pisses his pants on their marble floor and plush chairs.

America's Dilemma

It is the final presentation of the day -- except for the aftermath.

The "On Air" warning is lit..

The announcer says: "Silence on the set."

"We are on the air."

The camera's red light comes on.

A clacker crosses the screen: *America's Dilemma*, # 2025."

The set is arranged like *Jeopardy!* Dominated by 5x5 square backlit LCD panels -- now blank and dark. Three lecterns are arranged in a half-circle.

The spotlight illuminates Dick Cavett at the elevated host's podium. Two guests are at lecterns in the shadows.

The announcer says:

This is *America's Dilemma!* Where real American people, help real Americans solve real American problems.
Ladies and gentlemen, we have gathered here the best people in the world to answer these children's dilemmas: You! Real Americans! In the studio and at home…

The studio audience has already heard the problem and written their suggestions. From television land, call the number on the screen to offer your help and input.

And now, please welcome your host: Dick Cavett, from Yale University!"

Dick Cavett's podium flashes red, white and blue. He ducks his head and gives a tiny smile with a restrained wave.

"His guest experts tonight are, first: Carnac the Magnificent from far far east…. Somewhere around Chicago."

"Nebraska," says Carnac.

"Nobody comes from Nebraska," the announcer answers.

"And also, the wizard with a pen, Washington Irving, direct from Sleepy Hollow…"

Washington Irving sits like an exhausted scarecrow eloped from the field: exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, hands that dangle a mile out of his sleeves, and feet that might have served for shovels with a small head, huge ears, large green glassy eyes, and a long snipe nose.

He begins to unfold himself, when the announcer says: "And now let the show begin!"

Dick Cavett looks at the audience and then looks off set. He says, "I'm also from Nebraska."

"Nobody comes from Nebraska," the announcer replies.

"That's why I sound British," Dick Cavett says to the audience.

Then, in his show voice, he says:

Welcome to our television audience. For those of you joining us for the first time… where have you been?

No, just kidding…

Let me explain how America's Dilemma works.

You are going to give advice to four famous American children facing problems anyone might face… Any normal American…
But these are special Americans. Jonas Salk, who invented the cure for polio. David Kearney McDonough, a slave who became a Manhattan doctor. And George Washington. I forget what he did…

(Hint for homeschoolers: he was the First President of the United States.)

They are coming to you for your advice.

We rely on you to advise them.

But we also rely on experts.

Tonight, we have two experts. Both wizards. Chosen for their ability to discern truth without evidence and give advice before they hear the problem.

The first is my old friend and nemesis, Carnac the Magnificent.

Dick Cavett turns to look at Carnac in the podium to his left: "I heard you tripped on the way in. Very glad you made it," he says with a friendly twinkle.

"Carnac the Magnificent is not accustomed to gravity," Carson replies.

"So I hear," responds Cavett. "Air is rarified at the top."

"As you say: There can only be one king of nighttime television."

"And, fortunately for all of us: only one Carnac!" says Cavett.

Cavett turns back to the audience:

Aren't we lucky to have Carnac the Magnificent -- direct from the ghostly realm beyond Sleepy Hollow to reveal the mysteries of the universe…

From his podium, Carnac says: "Sleepy Hollow is the other guy. I'm from Burbank."

To Carnac, Cavett says: "I thought you were from Nebraska."

"Nobody's from Nebraska," says Carnac.

To the audience, Cavett says:

Let me introduce our second wizard – a wizard with a pen. The one and only true journalist of American forklore and satire:
Washington Irving!

Washington Irving unfolds and stands up with a bow to Dick Cavett, Johnny Carson and the audience:

My gracious host, let me thank you for this honor.

Hard-earned and well-appreciated.

There are men who seem to have been born with a pen in their hand. They write with ease and fluency, and pour forth their ideas with a copiousness that astonishes their less gifted brethren.

But there are others, like me, who must think deeply, read widely, and digest slowly, before they can utter a single sentence worth preserving. These are the true laborers in the vineyard of literature; they do not scatter their seed upon the surface, but plant it deep, and wait patiently for the harvest. I stand here before you today…

He is still talking when the red light goes off on his camera, and his podium goes dark.

“He wrote all those characters with a quill!” says Cavett. “You gotta admire the guy. Imagine what he would do with a computer!”

“That is what happens when you have too much time to think before you write,” says Johnny Carson. “My thinking capacity ends at a hundred and forty characters.”

“Does that man have any idea what 30 seconds costs?” asks the announcer.

“If it can’t be said in 30 seconds, it isn’t worth saying at all,” agrees Cavett.

They all look at Washington Irving, who is standing like Pinocchio on strings, still talking and gesticulating and nodding his head at the audience as if they could hear.

Dick Cavett shakes his head.

He turns back to the audience.

And now, let’s get on with our show… The first child to share his dilemma and ask for your help is none other than: George Washington!

“He was the first President of the United States – for those who don’t use quarters any more,” Johnny Carson says. “They don’t put his visage on credit cards.”

Dick Cavett turns to Carnac: “Carnac the Magnificent, can you divine why George Washington has sought our assistance today?”

Carnac the Magnificent raises his chin. Adjusts his quinceañera turban stuffed with thousand

dollar bills. With every movement, the bills flutter down around him.

He closes his eyes, places his fingers on his forehead, his elbows out and says, "I must have total silence."

"You usually get it," says Cavett.

As bills float from his hat and into his pocket, Carnac says,

I have received a message from the hinterlands. George Washington wants us to ask Google how to get out of Valley Forge.

"Google didn't exist in your lifetime," says Cavett.

"The *Thomas Guide*, then," says Carson.

"Mr. Irving, what say you? Why is the child George Washington asking for our help today?"

Washington Irving unfolds from the chair and begins to stand.

George Washington was one of the greatest Americans that ever lived.
He was no king, no Caesar, but a citizen.
A man who saw the nation as a trust, not a throne.

In his modesty lay his majesty.
George Washington hesitated to grasp command, yet never faltered once it was placed in his hands.

His character, pure and high stands in history in history like a marble statue in a garden of flowers — not gaudy, not fragrant, but of enduring beauty and majesty.

He was grave and deliberate…

"One hundred forty character limit exceeded. Twenty-eight percent went on air," says the announcer.

"Yes, yes, thank you very much," says Dick Cavett.

"People only remember 10% of that," says Carson.

"At best," agrees Cavett.

"We need them only to remember our sponsors," says the announcer.

Washington Irving is still talking but no one can hear him.

Dick Cavett to the studio: "Now, let's hear from the child himself… Everyone give a big hand to… George Washington!"

A child's voice says:

I played with a hatchet and cut down my father's cherry tree.
Now my father wants to know what happened.
What do I tell him?

In a loud whisper, Johnny Carson says: "Hide! I'll cover for you!"

Washington Irving is talking and gesticulating. But no one can hear him.

Dick Cavett to the studio: "Now, let's hear from the child himself… Everyone give a big hand to… George Washington!"

A child's voice speaks out clear and high: "I played with a hatchet and cut down my father's cherry tree. Now my father wants to know what happened. What do I tell him?"

In a loud whisper, Johnny Carson says: "Hide! I'll cover for you!"

Washington Irving is talking and gesticulating. But no one can hear him.

Dick Cavett says:

Well, now let's see what the audience has said. Remember television land -- send in your answers post-stamped tomorrow for a free token of gratitude from America's Dilemma! In no particular order, the top five responses are…

The band begins to play:

There's a great big beautiful answer…
at the end of every day.
A great big beautiful answer…
Just a turn away…

Backlit with LED, the first panel reads:

Your father can't prove it. Deny it.

Johnny Carson says: "Absolutely right! The American Way! Fifth Amendment! No one can MAKE me tell the truth!"

The music begins again, and the second panel turns.

If he has evidence, accuse him of planting it to frame you.

"The OJ Simpson defense," says Dick Cavett.

"Convicted? Witch-hunt! Caught? Framed. Recorded? Faked. Works in kindergarten, courtroom and politics," agrees Johnny Carson.

"Can't wait for the next one," says Dick Cavett.

The third panel flashes:

Tell him if he helps you out, you'll owe him later.

Bills tumble from Carson's quinceañera hat into his pockets. "I know nothing!" he protests, hands raised.

The fourth panel appears:

Blame the kid who always gets in trouble.

Carson quips, "Make sure he can't afford a good lawyer."

Cavett adds, "And none of your relatives give DNA samples."

"Please ensure that you go through all the steps of affirmative action before you point the finger," says the announcer.

The next panel seems to struggle – almost turning and then flipping back again.

Finally the panel reveals:

Confess. Repent. Cry, beg, promise to be good, pay your dues. It's all public relations anyway.

"The Jim Bakker defense," says Johnny Carson. "And Bill Clinton. Antiquated. The Headless Horseman doesn't even pretend to repent or reform. Just grabs what it wants whenever it wants it."

Cavett shrugs: "A cherry tree isn't really a big deal. Just a white lie."

Johnny Carson gives him a weak smile.

It's good John Rodgers is not on this panel.

Dick Cavett turns to the studio audience. "Let's move on to the next dilemma… The child requesting your help is Horace Mann."

Carson touches his turban and says, “Carnac the Magnificent predicts the problem: whether to change his name from Horse Man to Mister Ed.”

“Straight out of the horse’s mouth,” says Dick Cavett.

To the audience: “And now: Horace Mann!”

A child’s voice:

In my town, poor children cannot afford to go to school. I think every child has a right to free education. What should I do?

Irving is flapping like a rag doll, but unheard. Cavett turns to the boards.

Carson adjusts his quinceañera turban and a volcano of thousand dollar bills shoots out, burying him in debt. “My tuition bill at the public university,” he says. “For one semester.”

“I thought they had a football team,” says the announcer. “Brain damage isn’t too big a price to pay for education.”

“At Yale, we don’t discuss tuition,” says Cavett. “It’s bad form and impolite.”

Cavett then says: “Let’s see what the audience said.”

First flip:

Tell ICE and they’ll get rid of those kids for you.

Carson: “In private, well-funded detention centers that rival the Anderson Prison during the Civil War – deals made on islands among the elite of the world. Go Darth Vader”

Second flip:

It would be better for them to work than go to school.

"That's right!" says Carson. "Just work harder!"

One shift, two shifts, three shifts four
That will barely get you through the door.
Five shifts, six shifts, seven shifts more
Week's not done and your knees are sore.
Eight shift, nine shifts, ten shifts more
Now you get a bed on the master's floor.

"We don't call it slavery," says Dick Cavett with a frown.

Third flip:

Give them a schoolhouse but don't bother to train the teachers.

Carson: "So clever. That gets all those soft-hearted sissies off your back. And they never realize what you're doing with your selective funding."

Washington Irving is practically bouncing out of his seat – looking like Raggedy Andy in a hurricane. His arms are flapping and his legs are bent like a jumping jack. "Education is a right!" his lips seem to be saying.

But no one can hear him.

Fourth flip:

Pay their parents to keep them home to learn from Sesame Street and Reading Rainbow.

"And then cancel the shows!" cries Johnny Carson. "Beautiful!"

"No-skool, they call it," says Dick Cavett. "I think they mean no skull."

Fifth flip:

Make them work for a generation or two to justify the expense of education.

Irving suddenly surges up in his chair, flapping his long arms, and for a brief blip of a second we hear: "…the noble temple of learning, whose columns must be hewn with care…"

He is still talking.

Dick Cavett says to the audience and explains: "His agent had requested 6 weeks to respond our questions. I believe he misunderstood. He thinks he gets to talk for 6 weeks."

He shrugs and flicks his pencil. "Our next child is David Kearney McDonogh. Carnac the Magnificent, do you have any advice for this young man?"

"If you have to ask, the answer's know," says Johnny Carson.

A boy with a strong southern drawl says:

Born a slave in Louisiana, I completed college with top scholarship in every subject, mastering Hebrew, Latin, and Greek as well as speaking fluently in French, English, Spanish, and German.
I have the funds to attend medical school from my ex-master and sponsor, John McDonogh.
But every medical school in the United States has rejected my application because I am black.
What should I do?

"What about an apprenticeship?" asks the announcer.

"Ignorance teaching ignorance creates an illusion of learning," David says. "I've been home-schooled. I know the difference. I want a real education where I can learn from other students as well as from the teachers. Where I am ensured the basic foundation to teach myself."

Cavett says: "You should apply to Yale. We always accept the best. Especially if they are minorities."

The boy says: "Yale rejected me. As did Harvard. Columbia. William & Mary. All of them."

"Let's see what the audience says," Cavett answers, his neck reddening.

Flip 1:

You shouldn't go where you aren't wanted.

"Like the Rotary Club, the yacht club, the dining halls and hotels," says Carson.

Flip 2:

You should be grateful just to be free.

"That's right! Not in a stall. Just a corral." says Carson. "Working 10 shifts to feed your family."

Flip 3.

Blacks can't be doctors. Do something else.

Carson waves his hand and Cavett flips the next panel.

Flip 4:

Just wait. Things will change one day.

“After you and your kids have already rotted away,” says Carson.

Flip 5:

You never lose until you quit.

“Have you ever been black in America?” the child asks. “You never quit. You can’t. But it never ends.”

“Have a white guy fill out the application, bring the transcript, do the interview, and then show you show up the first day,” Carson says. “Surprise!”

Washington Irving is still talking and waving his hands.

Dick Cavett says, “Well, there you have it, Mr. McDonogh. The feedback. Let’s move on to the next child: Jonas Salk.”

“Isn’t he a musician?” asks Johnny Carson.

Cavett, to the audience: “Well, let’s hear from him.”

A child says:

I am the only man in the world who knows how to cure polio.
I can restrict it to those who can pay and become very, very rich.
What should I do?

Carson says, “Get a body guard.”

Cavett says: “If you donate it to Yale, it is tax free.”

His self-deprecating smile looks sad.

“Let’s hear from the audience,” says Cavett.

Flip 1:

Patent it. Put it up for auction. A big auction held in Switzerland.

Cavett looks at Johnny Carson who waves his hand.

Flip 2:

Keep it secret. Only for the people who are worthy of it. Choose who will live.

Cavett again looks at Johnny Carson who just shakes his head.

Flip 3:

Sell the formula to avoid liability. But keep the name. That way they take all the risk and you get all the money.

Flip 4:

Just charge a tiny little bit every time everyone uses. Like $10.00 or something.

Flip 5:

Give it away. Save the world.

"You think?" says Johnny Carson.

Dick Cavett nods. "Maybe that," he says to Carson.

He turns to the studio audience.

And now you get to hear what those American gentlemen actually did when facing these dilemmas.

George Washington: "I told the truth and became President of the United States."

Horace Mann: "With the help of a multitude of others, I have many schools named after me now."

David Kearney McDonough: "I was a special student under Dr. John Kearny Rodgers and was awarded my medical degree fifty years after I completed my education at Columbia."

Jonas Salk: "I cured polio and no one knows my name."

Dick Cavett to the audience: "And, that, ladies and gentlemen, is how true Americans resolve their true dilemmas!

"How well did you score? Stay tuned for your diagnoses…

The "On Air" sign switches off.

Final session: verdict

The final session of the day is held at Federal Hall in New York – where George Washington took his oath of office. The old stone chamber is lit by flickering lamps casting long shadows across the columns. Outside, the sound of hooves circles endlessly along the cobblestones of Wall Street.

Johnny Carson is standing at a podium. William Duer, Dr. Wiki, and Washington Irving sit at a table beside him.

"*Burfie, hello*," Johnny Carson says.

"*Burfie, hello*," the audience echoes.

Thank you all for being here. I hope you had an eventful and interesting first day. I certainly did…

I'm Johnny Carson and I, assisted by William Duer. will be your host today for our final panel: Judging America.

Yes. Judging you. All of you.

Our jury are men and women from colonial times who escaped the kings of Europe and the generation that fought for our freedom from kings.

The Headless Horseman was invited but declined the opportunity to appear.

But his supporters are outside throwing things and breaking windows – waiting for their pardon.

Our final speaker today is Dr. Wiki.

Please note that Dr. Wiki is not a psychiatrist. The DSM-VIII is being consulted for the values it reflects – not to prove derangement. We are not endorsing labels. Not even

pretending they have ounce of validity as a psychiatric condition.

Calling psychiatry a science makes a mockery of science.

But the diagnoses do reflect values.

An individual value's are reflected by the choices the individual makes.

Our country has established its values by choosing a leader who is anti-social, paranoid, dependent, obsessive-compulsive, and delusional.

To present this argument, I turn the podium over to Dr. Wiki.

To applause, Johnny Carson sits down and Dr. Poindexter Wiki approaches the podium. Standing on his hind feet, with his forefeet on the podium, and his glasses on his nose, Dr. Wiki says:

Thank you, Mr. Carson.

Let me quickly establish the basis for my hypothesis.

It's called forced choice.

Given a limited choice, people choose that which most closely reflects their values.

A person who values truth, doesn't vote for a liar. A person who values empathy, doesn't vote for a man who is cruel. A person who values fairness, does not vote for a man who is arbitrary and impulsive.

It's very simple. Your choices define your self.

The only ethical defense for such a choice that does reflect your values is ignorance.

And that is simply avoiding responsibility. A trait well-represented in the Big Beautiful Government under the Headless Horseman.

America was founded on values. LIFE – liberty, independence, freedom and equality.

In those days: A gentleman was judged by his integrity, honesty, and service for others.

Please look up and see my first slide.

ANTISOCIAL BEHAVIOR

A pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others, occurring since age 15, as indicated by three or more of the following:

- Failure to conform to social norms (e.g., repeated acts that are grounds for arrest)
- Deceitfulness (e.g., lying, use of aliases, conning others)
- Impulsivity or failure to plan ahead
- Irritability and aggressiveness (e.g., repeated fights or assaults)
- Reckless disregard for safety of self or others
- Consistent irresponsibility (e.g., failure to sustain work or honor financial obligations)
- Lack of remorse (e.g., indifference or rationalization of harm caused)

An antisocial personality mows down anything in its path.

Goals justify harm. Harm is never regretting.

Failure to conform to social norms. If it is desired, take it – even if it belongs to someone else. Groping a woman in a dressing room and bragging about the ability to grab anything – because the rules don't apply to him. Mockery and name calling – a way of claiming superiority by acting like a child.

A firehose of falsehood averaging 21 misleading claims per day. Changing reality to fit what he wants to be true. Not even pretending that data or truth has any value.

Impulsivity ritualized. Firing people during tantrums, tweets as incantations, power grabs as performance art -- from Greenland to the Kennedy Arts Center.

Aggressiveness. Encourage violence from others – but hiding from them as well. Never leading them into the charge. "Take the gloves off." "Can't you just shoot them? Just shoot them in the legs or something?" "It'll be wild."

His pawns are fungible. Disposable. Valuable only for their loyalty. Their punishment a spectacle. He wants martyrs.

He never bleeds for his own blade.

Plundering our country and others like privateers.

Unconcerned with laws or treaties or fairness.

Seeking his own benefit no matter who is harmed.

Imprisoning people in private jails owned by friends bought for a room and bar tab.

No respect for law. No respect for the rights of others. No respect for the traditions of America. No respect for education. No respect for medicine. No respect for science.

No respect for the arts. No respect for history.

People are to be used and the country is to be plundered.

Thank you, voters of America.

We are now a country of sociopaths and anti-social personality.

One cannot deny that the country founded by the generation of 1776 is gone and destroyed.

Integrity has become greed.

From the table, Johnny Carson says: "Dr Wiki, surely you understand the danger of making such statements?"

Dr. Wiki says:

Of course. Anyone can see the dangers in this man. He admires North Korea and Russia.

The meanest are the best.

He likes brutes.

Power, to him, is stomping on people.

Fortunately, I don't really exist.

I'm a cartoon dog.
Even he and his followers can't get so upset that they attack a dog…. Can they?

"Are you attributing any limits to his cruelty, aggression, lies, and attacks?" William Duer asks.

"No," replies Dr. Wiki scratching behind his ear.

Essentially --

There is no difference between his followers and the Brown Shirts except opportunity. Given the opportunity, they would

behave no better. Disregard for humans is disregard for humans. It isn't negotiable. You care or you don't.

You're human. Or you're not.

You can't deny who you are.

You voted for this man knowing what he was.

Johnny Carson says, "Dr. Wiki, it is unusual for anyone to be quite so blunt."

And why is that – do you think? Because only one side of this debate is an anti-social personality.

And the antisocial personality at the head of this cult, loves to egg them on and attack truth wherever it might appear.

Any one who speaks against him must have a "death wish" – because his thugs are anti-social Darth Vaders hiding behind their masks and absolute obedience rather than humanity and virtue.

They'll even attack a cartoon dog.

"Okay, well. We'll see what the censors do with this. Thank you," says Carson.

"Do you recognize anyone who fits this profile?" Duer asks.

Carson shrugs: "Nobody I've heard of."

Dr. Wiki puts up the next slide.

DELUSIONAL BEHAVIOR

A delusion is defined as a fixed, false belief that is held with strong conviction despite clear or overwhelming evidence to the contrary. It is not simply a misunderstanding, misperception, or

lack of information—it is incorrigible, implausible, and unshakable.

Delusions exist when:

The belief is held with absolute conviction.

It cannot be changed by contrary evidence.

It is false.

Dr. Wiki says:

Delusions are scaffolds for the frightened.

They hold up a fragile ego when truth would collapse it.

They are held without external validation because they are not true. A delusional person cannot face ambiguity. Cannot be wrong. Needs everyone to confirm the delusion.

Typically, a delusion will be repeated because there is a magical belief that anything said often enough becomes true.

Even when everyone knows otherwise.

"A stable genius."
"Crowds bigger than Barack Obama."
"I alone can fix it."
"Nobody knew healthcare could be so complicated."
"I've been treated worse than Abraham Lincoln."
"We won by a landslide."
"The election was stolen."
"I'm the most honest person you'll ever meet."
"Nobody builds walls better than me."

The bricks in the temple of delusion; the chant in the cult of the self.

Topped off by a military parade.

"Anybody we know?" Carson asks Duer.

"Nope," he says.

OVERLY DEPENDENT BEHAVIOR

A pervasive and excessive need to be taken care of, leading to submissive and clinging behavior and fears of separation.

Wiki says:

The Headless Horseman is not independent—he is addicted to adoration. He requires flattery like oxygen, loyalty like armor, and obedience like ritual. He has an incessant need for reassurance, flattery, obedience, absolute loyalty….

He cannot stand alone. His decisions must be scaffolded by sycophants, his ego propped up by praise.

Obviously, these are part of his overall syndrome. He is extraordinarily insecure. Frightened like a child. He cannot bear to be less than perfect. He cannot deal with ambiguity.

He needs absolutes and someone to reassure him at all times.

He delegates blame. Places failure on his loyal minions.

He cannot stand independently or alone with the decisions he makes.

They must constantly tell him how good he is. How smart he is. How he sees what no else sees. Just as he tells himself. Surrounds himself by power and money. Spends his nights watching himself on television.

He demands a chorus of sycophants. Allows no disagreement because he cannot tolerate doubt."

"Know anyone like that?" Carson asks.

“Not me,” says Duer. “I’m not worried. He’ll never recognize himself.”

“He’d have to acknowledge truth to claim damage," says Carson.

“Exactly,” sais Duer. “If the glove fits, you must acquit.”

OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE BEHAVIOR

To meet the diagnostic threshold, an individual must experience obsessions, compulsions, or both. These are defined as follows:

Obsessions: Recurrent and persistent thoughts, urges, or images that are intrusive, unwanted, and cause marked anxiety or distress The individual attempts to ignore, suppress, or neutralize these thoughts—often through compulsive behavior

Compulsions: Repetitive behaviors (e.g., hand washing, checking, ordering) or mental acts (e.g., praying, counting, repeating words) performed in response to an obsession or according to rigid rules

---

He must be in absolute control.

Control is his altar. Ritual his offering Mistakes are sacrilege.

Again this is a sign of a very serious weakness. Fear. Fear of being less than perfect. Fear of making a mistake. Fear that he is wrong.

Requires absolute agreement and obedience. Loyalty tests.

Obsessed with minute details in everything he does.

Must have total control.

“Ring any bells?” asks William Duer.

Carson says, “All of them. But I don’t know for whom the bell tolls”

PARANOID PERSONALITY

A pervasive distrust and suspiciousness of others such that their motives are interpreted as malevolent, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts.

1. Suspects, without sufficient basis, that others are exploiting, harming, or deceiving them
2. Preoccupied with unjustified doubts about the loyalty or trustworthiness of friends or associates
3. Reluctant to confide in others due to unwarranted fear that the information will be used maliciously
4. Reads benign remarks or events as demeaning or threatening
5. Persistently bears grudges, is unforgiving of insults, injuries, or slights
6. Perceives attacks on character or reputation that are not apparent to others and is quick to react angrily or to counterattack
7. Has recurrent suspicions, without justification, regarding fidelity of spouse or sexual partner

---

This is obvious.

He trusts no one because he is untrustworthy.

He does not trust loyalty, because he has no loyalty.

Truth is treason. Facts are sabotage. The press is the enemy. Reality is the hoax.

His grudges are sacred texts, nurtured in tweets.
.

"Do you know anyone like that?"

Carson, deadpan: "Only from television. What's the final count?"

Wiki says, "These categories are mix and match. Highly unreliable. We could continue to label him, but the behaviors become redundant."

He adds: "I've got 12 more."

"Six has condemned us pretty clearly, hasn't it?"

"Unfortunately so," says the dog.

He jumps off the podium.

Johnny Carson stands and goes to the podium. He moves the chair used by Dr. Wiki.

"We always like to end with a prayer," he says. "And, for that, we have the Reverend Doctor John Rodgers and the Right Reverend Doctor Charles Inglis. Please give them an enthusiastic welcome!"

John Rodgers and Charles Inglis come bounding in holding a sign saying "The Revolutionary Reverends."

John Rodgers taps the microphone and Johnny Carson winces.

The stand together.

In unison, they say: "We are the Revolutionary Reverends."

"I supported the king," says Charles Inglis, the handsome one.

"And I supported the rebels," says John Rodgers, the other.

"We did what we believed was right for our times and our people," they say together.

Every choice you make is either for yourself or others.

If it is for yourself, the ripples of your life will disappear like a stone in a lake.

But if you join with others, you can flood the world.

"Most boys and girls want to be good," says John Rodgers.

"But it is difficult to know what is good and what is bad when everyone is angry," says Charles Inglis.

"So how do you know what is good and what is not?" they say together. "Love will always give more; hate will always take away. Pain will cause withdrawal, a hug will bring you close."

If the message is hate:
it is meant to hurt.
If the message is fear:
it is meant to control.
If the message is blindness:
it is meant to deceive.

If the message is a lie:
it is meant to delude.

If the message is caution:
it is meant to warn.

If the message is courage:
it is meant to strengthen.

If the message is hope:
it is meant to encourage.

If the message is love:
it is meant to bring us closer
to one another
and, therefore, to God.

The two men, wigs slipped a little, bow to one another and shake hands and leave.

“Day one is adjourned,” says Johnny Carson.

And -- finally -- he gets relief.

The Verdict: 100 Years Later

Burfie!
Hello!
Say Burfie before you say hello!
Remember: Federal law requires that you wear your *Burfie* at all times.

The day of the verdict has arrived! At last! A hundred years have passed since the Dick Cavett Show 2025 gave rise to this case.

I am William Duer, your correspondent for the antiquated LIFE Magazine. LIFE – liberty, independence, freedom and equality… From those days when your word was worth more than gold and when integrity could not be bought and sold…

Long gone, I fear…

But, today there is hope…

We have been waiting 100 years for justice!

The verdict is to be announced in the case of *Audience Inc. v. Big Beautiful Government and the Headless Horseman.*

The verdict will be read as soon as it is approved by the Big Beautiful Government and the Headless Horseman.

The Big Nine are being ushered inside the White House right now.
Do you hear the band?

There was a crooked man, and he bought
a crooked mile,
He found a crooked Pres'dent and liked
his crooked style;
He bought a crooked cat, which caught a
crooked mouse,
And they all celebrated together

in their crooked little white house….

The Big Nine are inside getting their instructions.

We can only wait.

But we are not alone.

People are lined up all along Pennsylvania Avenue, hoping to get a glimpse of Justice. *Burfies* are everywhere. Mounted on selfie-sticks, hats, and run up flagpoles with the hope of making contact when the Big Nine passes.

The Nine will proceed along that red carpet on their way to the Cathedral of Justice. They will pass right in front of me.

And, when they do, we will download their Favorites from their contact list with our ultra fast *Burfie Geiger*. (Available @Burfiegeiger.net: details on the screen.)

And, remember, now: it's mandatory.

No matter where you are; no matter who you are – unless you're exempt – you must always have a Burfie visible, registered and instantly accessible by the Big Beautiful Government.

The Bill passed this year without dispute. All hands in the pot, as they say: LMT, BA, CXW, GD, RTX, NOC, MCK, HII, LDOS, LHX, HUM, HON, BAESY, FLR, BAH, ACM, SAIC, GOOG, GE, PFE, UNH, J, PSN, CACI, KTOS, VVX, MRCY, JPM, GS, BAC, LIBOR, AVAV, TXT, AMZN, MSFT, ORCL, IBM, CSCO, GDIT, BMY, TMO, GILD, ABBV, CVS, CAH, ABC, WMT, DG, FDX, TSN, CARGILL, ADM, UPS, DXC, HPQ, DELL, VZ …

…and, of course, TSLA.

Every dollar equally distributed from the consumer to the coffers.

And the consumer? Valuable only if the benefit is less than the cost.

Soles stomping souls.

It's their geyser theory of the economy. You squeeze and squeeze until money spurts out. Mortgages, bonds, student loans…

Once in debt, always in debt. Scrambling and scratching to keep the geyser going.

The Nine are essential to the success of the Big Beautiful Government.

Speaking of which…. Here they come!

Listen to the *Burfies* vibrating ahead of us!

Yes, yes, they are coming.

The Big Nine is on their way!

Noses led by mercenary veterans fresh from Abu Ghraib and Nisour Square — a free service funded by overflowing coffers of SWBI, RGR, VSTO, OLN, POWW, AOUT, NPK, and AAXN — spilling into the Big Beautiful Government's moat of rich pigs and seeping into the ground of O'Liargram's bed, bar tab, and black ops.

Draped in somber robes hiding gilded chains and bicycle jerseys stamped with sponsors. Tender innards protected with Kevlar underwear from the NRA.

Marching on blood-red carpet separated from the masses by velvet ropes with gold tassels — provided, at no additional cost, by FDX, UPS,

FLR, KBR, and HAL. ("Asking only a favor or two, should the need arise.")

And here they come… The Big Nine! Right past the *Burfie Geiger* meter…

And what do we find… Here come the Justices one-by-one:

#1 passes; *Burfie* flashes: RGR, SWBI, VSTO, AOUT…
#2 passes; *Burfie* flashes: JPM, GS, BAC, LIBOR…
#3 passes; *Burfie* flashes: FDX, UPS, FLR, KBR, HAL…
#4 passes; *Burfie* flashes: LMT, BA, RTX, NOC, GD…
#5 passes; *Burfie* flashes: PFE, MCK, HUM, UNH, CVS, CAH, ABC…
#6 passes; *Burfie* flashes: CXW, GEO, TSN, CARGILL, ADM…
#7 passes; *Burfie* flashes: CACI, LHX, DCP, LLL…
#8 passes; *Burfie* flashes: AMZN, MSFT, ORCL, IBM, CSCO, GOOG, PLTR…

#9 passes: *Burfie* flashes: NRA, NAR, PhRMA, AMA, Alphabet, Meta…

And all of them flash for TSLA.

Download interrupted.*

We seem to have a problem with the Burfie Geiger. I am to immediately advise you to forget what you have been told.

Big Beautiful Government will give you alternative facts via your personal Burfie within the next ten minutes.

We seem to have lost our *Burfie* feed.

But, the parade is ending at the steps of the Cathedral of Justice. Granite steps carved by the sweat of slaves in the swamp under the government whips.

The Big Nine take the elevator — arriving at jet speed.

And go as high as the bidding will go.

And, that's all folks.

Apparently the verdict isn't ready yet.

110 Years Later

A hundred and ten years later, Dick Cavett ducks his head and gives his shy smile. Still boyish at 164.

"So tonight we have a very special show," he says.

The Nine have issued the long-awaited Justice in the case of Audience Inc. versus the Dick Cavett show and the Big Beautiful Government.

This case arose from my 2025 show. The government screened the audience.

The screening question was: If you wanted to motivate a slow learner would you be willing to administer 350 Volts?

Those people who answered "Hell, yeah!" or with similar enthusiasm were considered excellent candidates for the Big Beautiful Government, given the standards set forth by Milgard. Shocking people who made mistakes…

But then it was discovered that 350 Volts was the name of a performance enhancing drug… Everyone wanted to help improve the performance of the government.

A careless mistake. So stipulated the Headless Horseman and Big Beautiful Government under seal buried by denials.

But the government is allowed carelessness. Only deliberate and intentional persecution is considered personal.

Otherwise, they treat you the same as everyone.

Audience was furious. Completely misidentified.

They claimed months of nausea whenever they heard their names associated with the Headless Horseman and the Big Beautiful Government and could barely face their friends with such a brand upon their names.

They wanted their disassociation noted immediately.

The government agreed. But couldn't erase the past.

Anywhere. And, surprisingly, the past kept cropping back up like a plant that won't die. "Oh, you're the…"

No escaping the embarrassment and shame.

So, they went to court.

And today, after 110 years, we finally get the Court's decision.

As you recall from the last time they issued a decision, the Justice's names are no longer released to the public.

Only their decisions.

Too embarrassing.

They haven't been seen in public in ten to fifteen years.

They fly from place to place in corporate perks or paid for by you and the government. They vacation on islands and trade property in other people's names and cheat on their taxes. Their wives collect on their decisions and their husband rake in the cash.

And the publishers lap up the controversy.

You can see why they wouldn't want their names revealed.

Each Justice is given 144 characters to give the decision. Then, the Government's mouthpiece, Coyote News (Fare & Preyed), gets 144 characters to explain the decision.

And William Deur is responding for Audience Inc. and the Sons of Liberty.

Twitter Panel #1: "The justice system does not exist to protect the individual. No action lies against the govern—"

Dog News, what do you have to say about this?

"—ment. Exactly right. Separation of powers keeps order. This Court defends liberty by refusing personal vendettas as lawsu—"

"And Sons of Liberty, Mr. Duer, do you anything to say?" asks Dick Cavett.

"No action? No shield? You are alone before the throne, stripped bare, unguarded— Deposit another nickel to cont—"

"So there you are," says Dick Cavett. "An individual cannot take the king to court."

Twitter Panel #2: "An individual has no standing. Only entities recognized by law may sue. Audience refiled as Audience, Inc. and was he… "

and by Coyote News: Fare and Preyed, " …ard. That's the genius of our system. Citizens United. Voice amplified by incorporation. Rights secured by corpor—"

"William Duer, Sons of Liberty, anything to add?

"You must become fiction to be heard. Flesh erased, contract enthroned. You vanish into ledgers, only a shell of— Deposit coin to co—"

Dick Cavett says, "As individuals, Audience had no standing to speak. But Audience, Inc. has

rights that only citizens united has. A corporation can speak where a citizen is mute. Or moot? Any difference?"

Dick Cavett shifts a little uncomfortably. "I'm a little afraid to…," says Dick Cavett. "But let's look at Twitter Panel #3."

"Standing requires a concrete, particularized injury. Public interest is not a right. No damages, no case, no tri—" (Coyote News: Fare and Preyed, adds:) "—al. Exactly. Courts handle facts, not feelings. Injury must be tangible. Stability preserved. Liberty secured by prece—"

William Duer, Sons of Liberty says:
"No injury? No shame? No wound to the soul? No breath stolen? No right denied? No future stolen? If pain isn't harm, what— Deposit 5¢ to co—"

Cavett:

So there you are: no injury to the soul. Only the body matters.

Not mortal wounds to a man's values and beliefs… LIFE – liberty, independence, freedom and equality has no place in law.

No evidence. No definition.

The law has no soul.

What then is the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness? Empty words?"

Dick Cavett shifts in his chair, fingers tapping the desk with the pencil and looking at the pencil. "Well… here goes.

Twitter Panel #4:

"An anvil—even horrific—suspended overhead is not injury. Fear is not harm. The rope intact, the guillotine unfallen, no da…" (CN:FYP) "…mage. Courts deal in facts, not what-ifs. No remedy for shadows. Only real cuts, real blood. Common sense, stability, prece—"

William Duer, Sons of Liberty, sputters: "No harm til' the skull splits? Not harm till the rope snaps? The fear, the terror, the paralysis— all noth— Deposit 5¢ to cont—"

Dick Cavett lifts his eyebrows with a half smile. "It appears you need to have the guillotine fall before the threat will be believed. Put your suspicions in your will."

Then he turns to another camera and takes a deep breath and says: "Now, as you all know, we all get a little weary about this time in the show. Dreary weary law, they call it in the Big Beautiful Government. So we've got a little break for you.

The Watts Globetrotters have a special reminder for all of you.

Catch a needy man
and put him on your docket
Never let him get away.
Catch a needy man
And put money in your pocket:
$147,945.21 every single day.*

*An estimate based on $4.5 million per month to house a few hundred people in Texas. The coolest part of Texas.

"Excuse me. The sponsors have indicated that they were doxed and this was not their responsibility. They will pay extortion as necessary to get permission from the Big

Beautiful Government to continue doing business."

"Well, perhaps this will do better.

Twitter Panel #5 is the special panel – the answer voted most patriotic and true.

Balloons fall from the sky, fireworks shoot in the air, a bugle sings "American the Beautiful"

And the panel turns:

Twitter Panel #5:

"Integrity, honesty, liberty, equality—no legal definitions exist. Abstractions are not enforceable. Only damages count, no exce…ptions. Exactly right. Noble ideals are poetry, not precedent. The Court defends law from slogans. Stability, clarity, Ameri—"

William Duer, Sons of Liberty: "No honesty? No liberty? No equality? You strip words, strip rights, strip life itself— Deposit 5¢ to cont…"

Dick Cavett says, "It is not proper to say that the law does not recognize values. That the law has no soul… The law does recognize values…. That's all it's about – who gets the biggest numbers.

But, sadly, LIFE – liberty, independence, freedom and equality has no value in the law."

"And the law has no soul… So what's left to save?

Twitter Panel #6 grinds to a halt. "Claims of soul-injury are metaphysical, nonjusticiable. Absent economic or physical harm, no cognizable injury at la[]w. Exactly. Courts protect facts, not fantasies. Soul wounds are sermon, not statute. Rule of law stands. Liberty secured, order ma—"

“No soul? No wound? No spirit crushed? No faith betrayed? No truth denied? The body screams but the soul— Deposit 5¢ to cont—”

Dick Cavett tilts his head.

I hadn’t ever heard it said this way. Let’s look at what they are saying.

Bodily injuries can be calculated by doctors bills times whatever number the insurance companies want to pay.

Emotional injuries can be calculated by two doctors who state the opposite of one another so that both parties can split things in the middle.

Contractual injuries are defined by dollars before the dispute begins.

But when your mortal soul is wounded by necrosis of values and meanness in the air and when it hurts to breathe the anger….

Where is one to go?”

Dick Cavett just shakes his head and moves on. The way he always does. But this time there is a lingering cobweb he can’t quite escape.

Twitter Panel #7: “Complaints of systemic bias are dismissed for want of jurisdiction. Judges are immune for acts within duty, yacht, jet, or island. Of course. This is judicial independence. Without immunity, rulings would be hostage to anger. Courts must be free, protec—”

William Duer, Sons of Liberty cries: “Immune on yachts, immune in jets, immune in palaces, immune while selling your rights at a bar tab in Mira La— Deposit 5¢ to cont—”

Dick Cavett leans back, his voice quieter, almost flat.

"I'm just thinking," he says. "Does this make sense to anyone? All those trips are admittedly in the service of the country by virtue of their positions and, yet, do not impact their decisions?"

"I wonder what DOGE would say about that."

He fidgets with his pencil, taps it once, twice. "Well… Twitter Panel #8."

"The justice system does not exist to protect the individual. Standing preserves separation of powers. If the government is corrupt, that's politics, not law. The Court's duty is to guard institutions, not grievances. Stability requires limits. Order requires de—"

William Duer, Sons of Liberty: "Not to protect you? Not your life, your liberty, your freedom? Justice calls itself termite, gnaws your house, chews your na— Deposit 5¢ to cont—"

Dick Cavett stares a moment at the panel, the smile gone.

"The constitution over the Bill of Rights," he says slowly. "Protect the king at all costs."

No individual really has an action against the government because the government must give its permission to be sued. As so many veterans have discovered: no permission is forthcoming. No research or evidence. Until after death and then there will be a plaque."

He shakes his head and looks at the audience, as actually looking into another man's eyes.

Whew. I must admit, I rarely find myself consumed during a show… But we saw so many veterans suffering from diseases their government refused to acknowledge.

Children playing on ground radiating from fall-out.

Water too yellow to drink.

Sometimes a man needs to step out of his role and speak the words that need to be spoken.

Sometimes a man must become someone he isn't so he can become someone he will be.

Dick Cavett closes his eyes, breathes, then straightens.

Twitter Panel #9 says:

"You misunderstand government. Idiocracy is reality. Article III is limited authority. The Bill of Rights was tacked on. We follow only the Constitution. This is restraint, not excess. The Court shows balance, virtue, continuity. Our system stands strong, principl—"

William Duer, Sons of Liberty cries: "Idiocracy reigns! Virtue erased. Rights discarded, sins enthroned. Your freedoms tacked, torn, erased—Insert 5¢ to co—"

Dick Cavett's hands slam the desk.

His voice shakes the rafters.

"When will this ever end?

When will this ever end?

If there is a God in heaven or earth, there can be only one question—”

How will this ever end

"HOW WILL THIS EVER EN—"

End